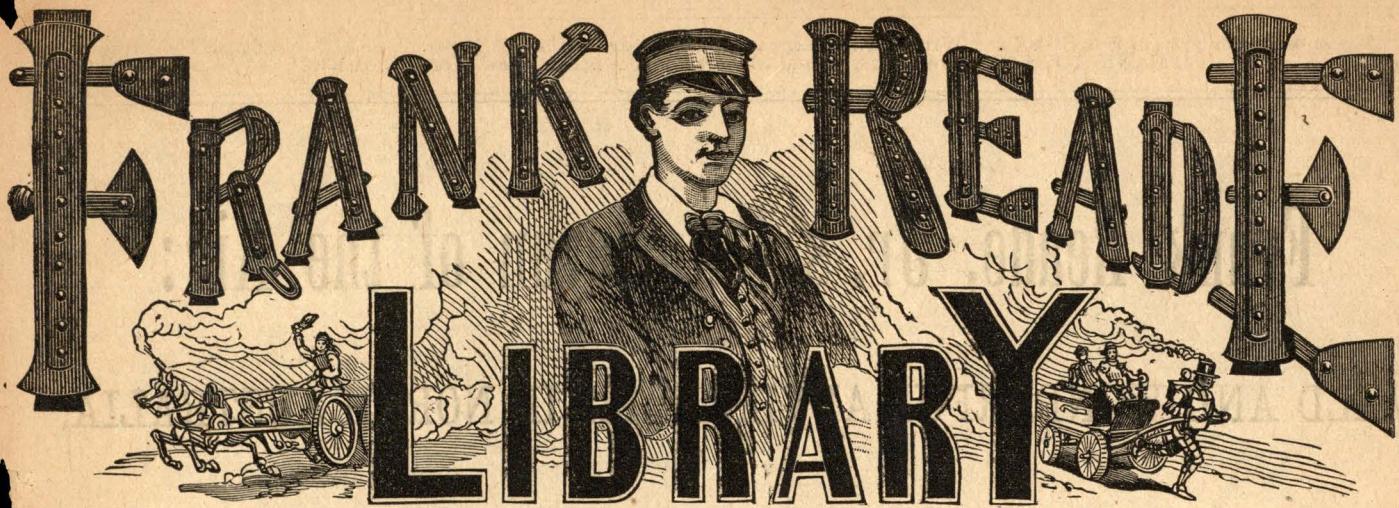


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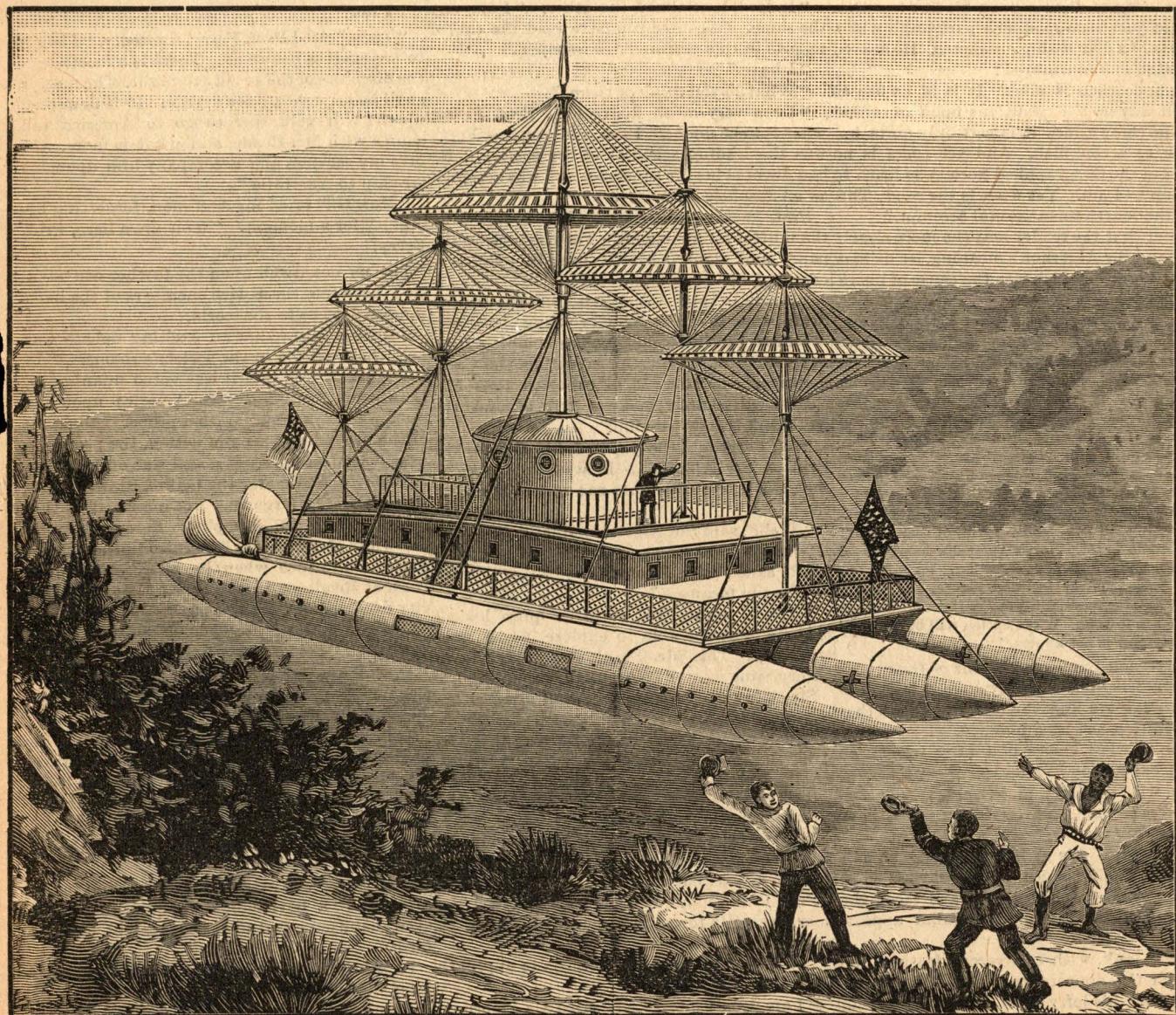
Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, October 5, 1892.

No. 90. { COMPLETE. } FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, NEW YORK. { PRICE 5 CENTS. } ISSUED WEEKLY. Vol. IV.

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FRANK READE, JR.'S CATAMARAN OF THE AIR; or, Wild and Wonderful Adventures in North Australia.

By "NONAME."



Suddenly, as they came out into the open, a cry went up from Pomp. "Golly, Marse Frank! Dere am de airship comin' fo' all it is worth!" This was quickly seen to be the truth.

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Frank Reade, Jr.'s Catamaran of the Air:

OR,

WILD AND WONDERFUL ADVENTURES IN NORTH AUSTRALIA.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade Jr.'s Marvel," "Frank Reade Jr., and His Air Ship," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST EXPEDITION.

SIR ALGERNON BARCOURT, M. P., sat in the reading room of the Piccadilly Club, London, England, with a newspaper in his hands and an expression of dismay upon his fine features.

He had just been reading a paragraph which truly was of a distressing character. He heaved a deep sigh and murmured :

"All hope then is gone! It is of no use to send out any more expeditions upon an errand which in these times it is certainly quite impossible to accomplish. And yet there is no member of the Geographical Society so loath to give it up as I am. Yet what is the use? This makes the fourth unsuccessful attempt."

In order that the reader may the more clearly understand Sir Algernon's meaning, let us look at the paragraph which was the cause of his remarks. Thus it read :

"Advices from Sydney, N. S. W., affirm the truth of the report that the Royal Geographical Society's exploring party is hopelessly lost in North Australia. Not a word has been heard from them for eighteen months, and it is quite safe to assume that they have shared the fate of past expeditions. In the party were the following members of the society : Captain McLain, Mrs. McLain, his wife, and Harriet, his daughter, Mrs. Vernon Beals and Alfred Ward, the accomplished naturalist. They had a body guard of 115 native soldiers. That they have fallen victims to the deadly perils of the country there is little doubt. North Australia has thus far baffled the best efforts at exploration. Its boundless deserts, poisonous reptiles and plants, and hostile tribes of natives make it a pestilential and dangerous region to invade. What action will be taken by the society now is not known."

Sir Algernon Barcourt was one of the prominent members of the society, and it had been at his instigation and through his efforts that the expedition had been planned.

"That is what comes of taking women on such an expedition," he muttered. "I argued in vain with McLain to leave his wife and daughter at home, but I might as well have spared my efforts."

"Quite right, Sir Algernon—quite right!" said a voice at the nobleman's shoulder.

Sir Algernon turned quickly and faced the speaker. He was a man of peculiar appearance.

Tall and lank, with cadaverous features, he had much the appearance of a Scotch schoolmaster. But his lofty brow, deep, penetrating

gaze and thoughtful air betokened him a man of no ordinary mental gifts.

"What is it, my dear Ferry?" cried Sir Algernon, joyfully. "Sit down. You are the person above all others I have desired to see."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the other. "I may say the same. Of course you have read the cabled reports in this morning's newspaper?"

"I have."

"What do you think of them?"

"I am very much distressed. Prof. Ferry, what is to be done?" Prof. Philosophus Ferry was the leading scientist of the society. He had devoted his life to science and was accepted as an absolute authority.

Prof. Ferry knitted his brows and was thoughtful for a moment. Then he took up the paper and glanced hastily over it. His eye-catching a paragraph, he said :

"Listen to this: A dispatch from the United States says that the famous young American inventor, Frank Reade, Jr., has completed his new and most wonderful invention, the Catamaran of the Air. It is expected that Mr. Reade will shortly make a trip around the world in his new air-ship!"

Prof. Ferry laid the paper down and looked hard at Sir Algernon. It was very evident that the same thoughts ran in the minds of each.

"Well?" said Sir Algernon, finally.

"Have we reached a solution of our problem?" asked Prof. Ferry.

"Do you mean—"

"Yes. I mean that it looks quite logical that we might be able to explore North Australia yet. This Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., is an enterprising as well as a philanthropic man."

Sir Algernon reached over and grasped his confrade's hand.

"Of course I know nothing about this air-ship!" he said. "I do not know that it will fly even!"

"It will, for Mr. Reade has invented and traveled in other air-ships!"

"Do—do you think that Mr. Reade could be induced to attempt such a thing?" asked Sir Algernon, excitedly.

Prof. Philosophus Ferry arose and paced the floor excitedly for a few moments. Then he paused.

"It would at least do no harm to approach him on the subject."

"I am deeply interested!" cried Sir Algernon.

"If money will secure Mr. Reade's services I will subscribe one thousand pounds this moment as my contribution to a fund for that purpose."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"Then," cried Prof. Ferry, excitedly, "I begin to see success before us. There is a meeting of the directors of the society to-night. The matter shall be brought up for debate. If it is agreed upon I will volunteer to go to America and confer with Mr. Reade, and what is more, will give my services and accompany him upon his air-ship to Australia."

"Hurrah!" cried Sir Algernon, forgetting his dignity for a moment. "You are a hero, Prof. Ferry!"

Let us not dwell upon the further conversation between these two members of the most famous society in the world.

Suffice it to say that an exciting debate was held that evening in the society's rooms.

The result was that it was voted unanimously to send Prof. Ferry to America upon his diplomatic mission. With a proper realization of the necessity of prompt action, the professor hastily packed his effects, and was off upon the next day's steamer for the United States.

The world at large was not informed of this action. Prof. Philosophus Ferry, so well known in England was incognito in the United States, and hence when he alighted from the train at Readestown, not one in that beautiful city dreamed of the presence in their midst of one of the most distinguished scientists in the world.

Prof. Ferry entered a carriage and directed the driver to convey him at once to the residence of Mr. Frank Reade, Jr.

This was done, and the famous young inventor, who is too well known to need a formal introduction, was somewhat surprised to learn from the name on the card that he was favored with a distinguished visit.

A few moments later they met in the library.

Prof. Ferry was amazed to find himself in the presence of a boyish-looking young man with clear, handsome features, and straight, athletic form.

In a brief, concise manner, Prof. Ferry outlined his mission.

Frank Reade, Jr., listened intently.

When the scientist had finished, Frank simply arose and said :

" Prof. Ferry, I am much interested in your story, and I would be deaf to the sentiments of humanity and of justice did I refuse to do all in my power to aid you. I think that we will have no trouble with the Catamaran of the Air in learning the fate of your party."

" What! " cried Ferry, overjoyed. " Then you will really go? "

" Myself and my new air-ship are at your service, sir."

Prof. Ferry began to effusively shower thanks upon Frank, but the young inventor interrupted him.

" That is all right, " he declared. " I am much pleased to be given a mission of the kind to enable me to make my trip around the world interesting."

This settled the matter at once.

It was arranged that Prof. Ferry should cable the society, and Frank announced that the catamaran would be ready to start within a week.

" Besides ourselves, " said Frank, " there will be as passengers on the catamaran my two servants, Barney and Pomp, and a scientific friend of mine, Dr. Vaneyke."

" Dr. Vaneyke! " exclaimed Ferry with pleasure. " He is connected with your Smithsonian Institute."

" Yes."

" I know him well, having met him in Brazil once. I shall be pleased to have Vaneyke as a traveling companion."

" I have no doubt that you will fraternize, " said Frank, with a laugh.

" So the problem of aerial navigation is solved! " exclaimed the professor. " I am very curious as to what sort of a machine your catamaran is, Mr. Reade."

" Indeed! " said Frank, starting up. " Then come along with me and I will show you!"

" I shall be delighted."

With this the young inventor led the way out of the library into the hall. Here a comical looking darky appeared and Frank said :

" Look here, Pomp, this is Prof. Ferry who is to accompany us in the catamaran to Australia. The professor wants to take a look at the airship. Tell Barney to bring the carriage up to the door at once!"

" All right, sah."

Away went Pomp like a shot. He passed into the servants' domain, and in the kitchen lit upon a short, diminutive little Irishman with brick-red hair and a brogue that stamped his individuality and nationality without further aid.

" Hi, dar, yo' lazy lishman! " cried Pomp, authoritatively. " Jes' yo' toss de straps onto de bays and bring 'em round to de front do fo' de Marse Frank."

Barney bridled up at once. He was disposed to resent the darky's manner. These two faithful servitors were ever the best of friends, and yet as full of mischief and fun as a nut is of meat. They were always playing games upon each other, with varying success. Barney proceeded to resent Pomp's brusqueness in his own peculiar manner.

" Begorra, an' who med yez the boss over me, yez ace of spades? " cried the Celt, angrily. " If yez iver address me in such an imperlite manner again, be me sowl I'll baste the jaw off av yez."

" Huh! yo' bettah spell able fust, yo' no'count lishman! " blustered Pomp.

" Bejabers, I kin do that in two ways! " cried

the excited Irishman; " take that, yez misfit monkey! Whurroo!"

Barney picked up a scoop of flour which the cook had left upon the table.

Into Pomp's face it went in a cloud. The effect was comical to witness, but not by any means so to experience.

Into nose, mouth, eyes and ears went the flour, and Pomp gasped and spluttered, and nearly choked to death. He was transformed in that moment, beyond all doubt, into a white man.

" Golly! glory, massy sakes alive! " gasped the astonished darky. " I jes' hab revenge fo' dat, yo' sassy lishman."

Then, recovering himself, he made a mad dash for Barney.

The Celt, screaming with derisive laughter, was not quick enough to get out of the way of the enraged darky.

The result was that Pomp's head came in contact with the Celt's abdomen, and so forcibly that he was butted clean through the door which led to the cellar.

The door giving way, Barney went down the cellar stairs like a football.

It would have killed an ordinary man, but the Celt picked himself up and made a dash up the stairs.

" Bejabers, I'll kill that naygur! " he yelled. " I'll break the back av him!"

But when he reached the landing Pomp was gone. The darky was the winner of the round, and Barney, muttering fierce threats of vengeance, hastened to the stable to get the span of bays and carriage, as ordered.

CHAPTER II. PROF. FERRY'S VISIT.

A FEW moments later the carriage was at the door with Barney on the box, and entering it Frank and Prof. Ferry were driven down to the shops where Frank Reade, Jr.'s wonderful inventions were constructed.

The carriage drove through a high gate into a large yard.

Here all was a scene of great activity.

Workmen were hurrying hither and thither, and the ring of anvils and the whirr of machinery filled the air.

" You have quite extensive works, Mr. Reade, " said Prof. Ferry.

" Yes, " replied the young inventor, briefly; " but come this way, professor."

Ferry followed the young inventor across the yard to a high arched building. Frank threw open a door and they entered.

The scene revealed was a most wonderful one.

There, before his eyes, Prof. Ferry saw the famous Catamaran of the Air.

Its beauty and wonderful conception far exceeded his wildest ideas. He gazed upon it for some moments spell-bound.

" So this is the catamaran! " he finally exclaimed, with a deep breath. " Well, Mr. Reade, I can only say that I regard it as a marvelous conception of a wonderful brain!"

" Really! " said Frank, with a laugh. " You are quite overwhelming, professor. But come, let me show you the craft."

With this the young inventor proceeded to show his visitor the mechanism of the catamaran.

Three huge cylinders, cigar shaped, were made of aluminum, finely tempered. These were joined together with bands of strongest steel.

A deck extended five feet from the ends of the cylinder, which was railed and highly pol-

ished. Rising from this was a structure which served as a cabin, and in which was the delicate but powerful electrical machinery.

Above this was a round tower which held the steering gear and electric key board. In this were circular windows, which could also be utilized as loop-holes in case of attack.

The cabin was divided into five compartments. One was the main saloon, which was grandly furnished. The second was the engine room, where was the electrical machinery. The third was the dining-room, the fourth, Pomp's culinary department, and the fifth the sleeping cabin, which held a dozen or more staterooms.

Prof. Ferry took this all in with the keenest of delight.

But he paid special attention to the electrical machinery, and the method of the elevation and propulsion used.

The catamaran was suspended in the air by means of fine suspensory helices or rotascopes. These were of a great power and speed, and when driven by the electrical engines would cause the catamaran to leap upward with terrific speed.

The propulsive power was gained by a simple devise, a huge propeller at the rear of the catamaran.

" How great a speed do you reckon that the catamaran will make? " asked Prof. Ferry.

" As fast as any train of cars on the globe! " replied Frank.

" You don't mean it? "

" Yes, I do! "

" Well, " said the professor, with a deep breath, " I shall be the most highly honored man in the world when I sail for Australia upon the famous catamaran."

" And that shall be at such a date as you may name! " said Frank.

" It will take me less than three days to make all arrangements! "

" Good! The catamaran will be ready at that time! "

Prof. Ferry returned at once to New York. He cabled to London as follows :

" SIR ALGERNON BARCOURT—I shall sail for Australia on the Catamaran of the Air, on Thursday of this week. I shall depend upon my friend Vaneyke, of the Smithsonian Institute for all scientific equipments. We shall hope for success.

" Yours in faith, PHILOSOPHUS FERRY."

The news got out and spread all over the country. All the newspapers came out with reports of the intended expedition, some of which were true, but many of which were almost wholly the creation of some daring reporter's fanciful brain.

The result was that the public interest in the affair became world-wide.

From every quarter within a radius of hundreds of miles Frank Reade, Jr., received thousands of letters and telegrams.

There was the scientific crank, who wanted to secure passage for himself. The student of Nature, the mineralogist, the historian and geographer and the capitalist and land agent. All wanted in some way to co-operate with the young inventor in his scheme.

It would have required an army of clerks to have read these letters, to say nothing of answering them.

Frank consigned the most of them unopened to the waste basket.

All arrangements were quickly made for the expedition. Barney and Pomp were busy loading stores aboard the catamaran.

One day a fat, jolly but learned looking old

gentleman alighted from the Washington train, and went at once to Frank Reade, Jr.'s house.

It was Dr. Vaneyke, the noted scientist and warm friend of the young inventor's.

He gained a warm reception.

"Ferry will be here to-morrow," he said. "Really, Frank, this is a trip I have always wanted to take."

"Well, it looks as if your wish would be gratified," said Frank.

"I am glad of that."

Barney and Pomp were elated with the idea of the trip. They worked hard and zealously upon the preparations.

At last everything was in readiness. The catamaran was in the yard and ready for the start.

Prof. Ferry was on hand with Dr. Vaneyke. The electric engines were in working order, and the voyagers all stood upon the deck waiting for the word from Frank Reade, Jr., to take leave of the earth.

A great crowd of curious spectators was gathered outside the yard. A band played, cannon fired a salute and then Frank Reade, Jr., pressed the electric key.

Up into the air shot the catamaran a thousand feet.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Prof. Ferry waved the American flag over the rail. The thunder of cheers came up from below and then the catamaran started on its way.

Readestown faded from view, and westward sped the air-ship upon the most wonderful exploring trip of modern times.

The Western States were passed over in one vast and marvelous panorama of scenic grandeur.

Over the mighty Rockies and on to the Pacific coast sailed the air-ship. The Golden Gate was passed over, and then the smooth waters of the Pacific lay beneath them.

The voyagers were delighted with the action of the catamaran, which carried them as upon wings. Frank was particularly pleased.

Any doubts as to the ability of the catamaran to carry its load were dispelled.

For a week the catamaran hovered over the waters of the Pacific.

Just below the Tropic of Cancer the Sandwich Islands were passed over. Then numerous smaller islands were seen, until one day the catamaran was directly upon the equator.

Still to the southward kept the air-ship, until by the chart Frank reckoned that they were not far from Auckland.

It was the plan of the explorers to proceed to Sydney, and from thence go northward to Arnhem Land and the unexplored region.

It was intended to make a stop in Sydney for supplies and some few articles of necessity.

So after sighting New Zealand, Frank kept the catamaran more to the westward, and in due time the continent of Australia was sighted.

The trip thus far had been a great success. Much of interest had been seen, and many important scientific points had been gained.

With the sighting of the Australian continent, the voyagers were all eager to take a look at the great land of the Antipodes.

So they crowded to the rail of the pilot tower, and Prof. Philosophus was the first to sight the city of Sydney with his glass.

It was not to be supposed that the exciting accounts of the intended exploring expedition had not reached Australia.

With direct cable communication with London, the people of Sydney had for weeks been

on the eager lookout for the coming of the wonderful air-ship.

Every householder upon rising in the morning had considered it his first duty to scan the sky from horizon to zenith for some trace of the wonderful air-ship.

Therefore, the catamaran was first sighted by a watchman in a weather signal tower. He pressed a telegraph key and sent the startling intelligence all over the city.

It brought out the population of Sydney en masse.

No event in its history had so thoroughly excited the little Australian seaport.

Preparations had been made for the reception of the distinguished aerial visitors.

The public square had been draped with bunting and decorated with tropical plants. Bands of music were playing, cannons were thundering, and in the center of the square a wide platform had been erected for the air-ship to rest upon.

As the catamaran hovered over the city like a mighty bird, the voyagers saw all this and Prof. Philosophus asked:

"Will you accede to their requests, Mr. Reade, and alight upon that platform?"

"Yes," replied Frank. "It will be better not to slight them I think!"

So the catamaran settled down and rested finally upon the platform erected for that purpose.

The people cheered madly, and a party composed of the city officials and a number of distinguished men advanced and greeted the voyagers most ceremoniously.

A speech of welcome was made, to which Frank replied gracefully.

Then the freedom of the city was extended to the visitors, and also an invitation given to a fine banquet.

This Frank was obliged to decline for politic and urgent reasons.

"We are aware that no time should be spared in looking up the lost party of explorers!" said Frank. "They are in the most deadly peril, if indeed alive. Therefore, we must lose no time in our quest for them!"

The city officials acknowledged the wisdom of Frank's assertion, though regretting his sudden departure. This ended the ceremony, and Frank gave orders to Barney to send the catamaran once more on her course.

Frank shook hands with the hospitable Australians, and stepped to the rail with the American flag in his hand.

The bands played, the cannon boomed, and once more the catamaran leaped into the air.

Straight to the north-west the catamaran headed. An extremely wild and mountainous country was passed over.

Then the boundary line of New South Wales was passed and the western corner of Queensland, and the catamaran hovered over the famous MacLea Plains, which in 1847 had been strewn with the bones of many explorers.

To the eastward rose the Flat Topped Hills, to the northward Mt. Hetherton and beyond was a mighty arid desert and the Emu Plains.

Frank now allowed the air-ship to travel very near the earth so that the smallest objects below could be described.

Up to this point no incident worthy of note had occurred. But from this on there ensued a variety of incidents and adventures almost without a parallel.

A great drove of kangaroos were seen upon the plain below.

The idea occurred to Frank to secure a fine specimen. Kangaroo hunting is considered a

noble sport, and the young inventor was not loath to participate in it.

The others were enamored of the project, particularly Barney and Pomp, who were intense lovers of sport.

CHAPTER III.

EXCITING ADVENTURES.

PROF. FERRY and Dr. Vaneyke saw an opportunity to study the flora and mineralogical attributes of the country, and were delighted with the idea of a few hours on terra firma.

Thus far they had made but few descents. It would seem good indeed to once more set foot upon the earth.

So Frank allowed the catamaran to descend upon a clear space in the verge of a mighty tropical forest.

To the northward extended the mighty plains covered with tall pampas grass and many flowering shrubs.

The catamaran rested upon the earth, and preparations were at once made for the kangaroo hunt.

No sign could be seen anywhere of the existence of human beings.

Frank did not believe that any existed in the vicinity. In fact, he believed that they were in a wilderness peopled only by wild animals and deadly reptiles.

Therefore a move was made which, under other circumstances, would never have been dreamed of.

Barney and Pomp were especially desirous of accompanying Frank upon the hunt. Indeed, the young inventor could not very well dispense with their services.

Prof. Ferry and Dr. Vaneyke were anxious to pursue their scientific research. There seemed no way for both parties to accomplish their purpose unless the catamaran was left alone.

This at first Frank was loath to do.

But he reflected that wild beasts could do the air-ship no harm, and as for the natives, there were evidently not any within a hundred miles.

"I don't believe there will be any danger, Frank," said Dr. Vaneyke, confidently. "I think we may safely risk it."

"Nor I," declared Prof. Ferry. "Of course you will anchor the ship well?"

"Certainly!" replied Frank. "I believe you are right. With the catamaran safely anchored and the hull charged with electricity we shall be safe enough!"

"Of course we will!"

"Begorra, Misther Frank," said Barney, earnestly, "it's mesilf as is very anxious to go wid yez on the hunt, but av yez say the worrud I'll shhtay an' mind the air-ship!"

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, "dis chile am dead stuck fo' to go wif yo', but if yo' say so, I'll jes' stay right yere."

"No," replied Frank, with resolution. "It will be safe to leave the catamaran for a little while, I feel sure."

So this move was decided upon. Frank had wires connected with the steel part of the hull which were charged from the dynamos.

If the current was turned on it was powerful enough to knock the senses out of any one who had the temerity to place a hand upon the hull.

Then the anchors were put out, and strong steel wires also were wound about the trunks of trees.

The catamaran seemed safely anchored. Then the two exploring parties took their leave of the air-ship.

Frank, with Barney and Pomp, set out for the open country, where the kangaroo was certain to be found.

The two scientists plunged into the forest. Thus they separated.

Both were intent upon the furtherance of their cherished hobby. For the time let us follow the hunting party.

Striking out over the pampas, the three hunters wandered on for some while.

Game was plenty and of all kinds.

Quails and pheasants were everywhere in great numbers. Jack rabbits bounded from every thicket, and occasionally a panther's lithe form went gliding away into the grass.

Deer and antelope were seen in the distance and occasionally a buffalo. But our hunters passed these by carelessly, being rather on the lookout for different game.

The kangaroo is a wonderfully shy animal to approach. The least suspicion of the nearness of danger will send it bounding away with strides of wonderful sort.

For a time it did not seem as if the party were to be rewarded with any great degree of success.

But suddenly Barney gave a sharp cry and threw his rifle to his shoulder.

Crack!

The bullet missed its mark and Frank Reade, Jr., who was on the lookout saw a magnificent specimen of the kangaroo bound past him.

The young inventor raised his rifle and pulled the trigger.

The bullet went true and the kangaroo, sixty yards away, fell in a heap.

It was a victory clean and sure and a yell of joy and approval went up from Barney and Pomp.

"Begorra, Misther Frank, yez have landed the game!" cried Barney. "Sure an' it's a beauty av a baste he is too!"

"Golly! Yo' made a fine shot dat time, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp.

Frank was elated with the success of his marksmanship, and was about to rush to the side of the dead kangaroo, when a yell of pain went up from Barney.

Something came down through the air like a cannon ball and struck him on the shoulder.

It brought a yell of pain from the astonished darky. The object lay upon the ground at his feet.

It was a huge boomerang.

If it had struck the Celt in the head, it would doubtless have knocked him into insensibility.

Frank was astounded.

"Whurroo! It's kilt I am!" howled the Celt. "Sure, phwat the devil hit me, I'd loike ter know?"

"Heavens!" gasped Frank. "It means that an enemy is close upon us. Break for cover, boys!"

The move was made none too soon. Several more of the boomerangs came hurtling through the air and fell happily by striking stumps of trees about.

The natives were doubtless secreted in a jungle not fifty yards distant. They did not at once show themselves.

The three hunters lost no time in getting to cover in the edge of the forest, near which they happened by chance to be.

Barney's shoulder pained him greatly, but did not prevent his making use of his rifle.

"Bejabers, av I cud only draw a bead on wan av the omadhouns, shure I'd moighty quick return the compliment!" he cried.

"I done fink yo' might hab a chance yet, Iish!" declared Pomp.

"That is so!" agreed Frank. "We had better get back to the catamaran as quickly as possible. But look!"

A sharp cry of alarm pealed from the young inventor's lips.

There was cause for it.

From the jungle, now less than one hundred yards away, came the natives. They were swarthy-hued fellows, with powerful limbs, and naked save for a breech clout and a sheep-skin mantle.

They wore huge rings in their ears and noses, and were as villainous looking a set as the mind could picture.

They were armed with boomerangs, slings, darts and javelins. They made the air hideous with their yells, and came on like a whirlwind.

Frank knew well what it meant to come to close quarters with these savages. Their ferocity and fiendishness was of the most awful kind.

To fall into their hands was a terrible fate. Barney and Pomp were also well aware of this and that it would be better to fight to the death.

But Frank's plan was to retreat to the catamaran.

Once on board the air-ship, of course they would all be safe and could set the onslaught of their foes at naught.

"Steady!" cried Frank, as the natives came on. "Now, let them have a volley!"

Crack! Crack!

Three bullets sped true to the mark. Then the Winchesters were instantly loaded and fired again.

The effect of the volley was in a measure gratifying. The natives were brought to a sudden check.

The loss of six of their number in almost as many seconds was to them a surprising and an appalling thing.

Caution is ever the attribute of the savage. At once they sank down in the deep grass and disappeared from view. But our adventurers were not so foolish as to imagine that the foe was repulsed.

"Look out, Barney and Pomp!" cried Frank, warningly; "they mean to surround us if they can!"

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, "I done fink we bettah make a break fo' de deeper woods!"

"All right, Pomp! You go to the right and you to the left, Barney, and I will take the center."

Away they went through the woods in this fashion. But how near the strategic foe came near surrounding them was quickly demonstrated.

Suddenly Barney, who was dodging rapidly from tree to tree through the forest, felt rather than saw a dark form in his rear. Then the next moment he was enwrapped in a powerful embrace.

Barney was a stout little Irishman, and though not heavy, he was a hard and plucky fighter. Instantly he began a deadly wrestle with his assailant.

This was one of the natives who had managed to make a detour in advance of his fellows.

The fellow tried to brain Barney with a powerful club, but the Celt caught it just in time.

"Whurroo! it's a ruction yez want, ye bloody barbarian!" cried Barney, wildly. "All roight; be me sowl, yez shall have the same. I'll tache ye betther than to cum sthalin up an a gentle-man in sich an imperlite manner."

With which Barney proceeded to wrench the club from the savage's grasp. But it slipped doubt.

from his hands as quickly as he gained it, and there was no alternative but a wrestle for supremacy.

It was a question now wholly of physical superiority. The way Barney went at his foe was a caution to prize-fighters.

The Celt was a fine wrestler, but a better boxer. As soon as he could get sufficiently clear of his foe's embrace to use his fists he proceeded to illustrate the manly art to the untutored savage in royal fashion.

The savage was "not in it." Barney knocked him down four times in succession, and the last time the fellow failed to respond to the call for time.

"Bad cess to the loikes av yez!" cried the Celt, wildly. "If there's any more av your relations as wud loike ter thy the same thing, begorra, I'm open to an engagement!"

But Barney heard others coming, and for once forgot his threat, and chose the better part of valor, which is discretion, and beat a hasty retreat.

Pomp had been having a lively time also. Four of the barbarians had pounced upon him at one time.

But the plucky darky managed to down two of them with the butt of his rifle and outfooted the other two.

Frank Reade, Jr., had been pursued by a dozen of the natives, and was only saved by slipping into a dense net of vines, and giving the foe a very clever slip.

A few moments later the three fugitives all came out of the forest and met each other. The foe were for the moment eluded.

"Thank Heaven, we stand a good show to beat them!" cried Frank, joyfully. "But you look as if you had been in a fight, Barney."

"Begorra, it only took four rounds to put me man to sleep!" cried the Celt. "But, shure, Misther Frank, was it not over yender that we wor after leavin' the catamaran, sor?"

Barney pointed to the edge of the forest just below. Frank Reade, Jr., gave one look and his face turned ashen pale.

"My God!" he cried, wildly. "That is the place, but—but where is the catamaran?"

Horror unspeakable settled down like an awful pall upon the three voyagers. There were the anchor ropes and the wires, but the catamaran was gone.

CHAPTER IV. THE WILD HOGS.

THE appalling effect of the discovery that the Catamaran was gone from its place of anchorage upon the three adventurers, Frank Reade, Barney and Pomp, cannot be expressed in words.

For a moment they stood dumfounded, and gazing blankly at the spot where the air-ship had been.

There were the anchors and the ropes and wires. They had evidently been severed. But as the gaze of the three adventurers roamed more closely over the spot they became aware of a thrilling fact.

Upon the ground about lay the lifeless bodies of a dozen or more of the natives.

They had evidently died from bullet wounds. Like a flash a comprehension of all burst upon Frank Reade, Jr.

"I have it!" he cried. "It is the work of Ferry and Dr. Vaneyke. They no doubt were pursued here by the savages, and having a fight with them, were obliged to cut the anchor ropes and get out of danger."

This was the correct explanation beyond a

Barney and Pomp saw it in the same moment and signified their belief to be the same. But nowhere in the air could the Catamaran been seen.

However, the scope of vision here was not large for the tall trees shut it in closely. But all this had passed through the minds of our adventurers in much less time than it takes to tell it.

There was need of immediate and desperate action.

The savages were coming with all haste and ferocity to a second attack. The situation was most critical.

"For your lives!" shouted Frank Reade, Jr. "Get to cover!"

But there was no need of this admonition. All in the party had scrambled for the first available point which afforded protection.

The natives, genuine bushrangers, had made themselves invisible in the midst of the under-brush which dotted the plain.

The North American savage, noted for his woodcraft, is in no wise a match for these cunning bushmen of Australia.

Their powers of scent, intuition and divination are almost superhuman. They will see plainly a trail where the ordinary hunter would be blind.

If the trail cannot be seen, they will scent it, and no sleuth-hound is better at this sort of thing.

With their incredible powers of making themselves unheard and invisible, they will creep upon a foe, while the latter is making up his mind that they are not within many rods of him, with the result that the unsuspecting European is suddenly stricken down in a flash of time and without any due warning whatever.

Their ferocity and brutality is something most frightful to contemplate. There is no barbarity which they will not inflict upon an enemy.

Nobody was better aware of this fact than Frank Reade, Jr.

He knew that they were in a desperate position.

He was well aware of the fact that the murderous foe was fast closing in upon them, and that only the most valorous of action would save them.

He fancied that he could even feel their presence near him already. To remain in one place was suicidal.

The best of tactics was to move about. Keep on the move and never let up fighting is the only way to hold the bushmen.

Every moment boomerangs or poisonous darts came hurtling through the foliage. Frank believed that the woods was the most secure spot that he could select.

So he kept on falling back before the advancing line of foes.

At every available point shots were fired, and sometimes with effect. But there was great danger of being struck by one of the poisonous darts.

This would mean death, and the adventurers took care to avoid them. Steadily the three plucky fellows held the bushmen at bay, and kept changing base in the forest.

But this sort of a battle could not go on forever.

The three brave men had thus far received no injury worthy of note. Several of the bushmen had been shot.

But now a sharp cry went up from Barney, and his companions saw that blood covered his face, and he fell in a heap.

One of the boomerangs had struck him a terrific blow, and for a moment he was completely dazed.

Frank and Pomp rushed to his side quickly and with alarm.

But the Irishman quickly recovered and staggered to his feet.

"Golly! am yo' done hurt, I'ish!" cried the darky, throwing his arms about him, "fo' de Lor' if you'se done killed, dis chile neber sleep again until he hab revenge fo' yo' death!"

"Don't attempt exertion, Barney!" cried Frank, anxiously. "I fear that you are badly hurt!"

"Begorra, an' is that yure opinyun!" cried Barney; "thin yez may ondesave yerselves fer I'm as good as two dead min yet, an' niver a bit worse. Whurroo! have at the haythins!"

And the Celt seized his rifle and began firing again at the bushmen.

The contest now was waxing hot. Boomerangs and darts came flying through the bushes in clouds.

It was little short of a miracle that our adventurers were not struck oftener. Had one of the darts struck them it would have been the end of the one struck. But fortunately they escaped these.

But it was already evident that the battle was drawing to close quarters. The end seemed near, and the bushmen would be likely to triumph.

Frank saw this and he experienced a sense of hopelessness and desperation.

What was to be done?

There seemed no alternative but to stand the ground and fight to the bitter end. Death must be bravely met.

"Begorra, Misher Frank!" cried Barney, "shure an' it luks as if the omadhouns have us done up this time!"

"You're right, Barney," agreed the young inventor, "but we can at least show them how to die."

"That we can, sor."

"Yo' may bet dat dis chile am gwine fo' to die hard!" averred Pomp.

But at the eleventh hour rescue came, and in a very curious manner.

Suddenly from the depths of the forest there came a strange, grunting sound. Down through the underbrush tore an animal of most peculiar appearance.

In some respects it resembled a hog, but it had a heavy mane, immense, long tusks, and deep-set, beady eyes of red. It came like a whirlwind, and Frank narrowly avoided being struck by the animal.

Then from the forest came wild cries of terror and pain. The bushmen were seen to be flying for their lives or climbing into trees.

In a moment the truth dawned upon Frank Reade.

"Heavens!" he cried, wildly, "it is a drove of wild hogs. Get up a tree for your lives!"

This was quickly seen to be the truth. Through the underbrush came a perfect horde of wild hogs. The Australian wild hog is larger and more fierce if anything than the peccary of South America.

In any sense he is a foe to be dreaded. When these hogs, in droves of several hundreds, take a "drive" through the country, they leave nothing living in their path.

No animal, not even the fiercest tiger, is a match for them. The moment that the "drive" strike a living animal, the keen tusks in a most incredible space of time literally tear the victim into mince-meat.

A man overtaken by a drove of a hundred or

more wild hogs would scarcely be found after the drove had done with him.

So the coming of the wild hogs through the woods had carried dismay into the ranks of the bushmen and had been the means of breaking up the battle.

How many of them had fallen victims to the hogs it was difficult to say.

Barney and Pomp had comprehended the situation almost as quickly as Frank. A big wild boar was making a lightning-like drive for Pomp, when with a yell the darky leaped up, caught the limb of a tree, and swung himself up to a place of safety.

He was none too soon.

Barney had a rent torn in the leg of his trousers before gaining a safe perch, Frank Reade, Jr., was out of danger.

The next instant the woods were alive with the ferocious animals. Like a devastating army they passed on.

They were quickly past. There was little danger of their return, and our adventurers quickly slipped down out of the trees in which they were.

It looked now as if they had an admirable opportunity for escape.

They saw it and embraced it. Frank Reade, Jr., led the way, crying:

"Come, boys! This is our chance! Make for the plain yonder!"

Frank's hope was that once out upon the plain the air-ship might be seen in the vicinity and come to their relief.

In this hope he was not to be disappointed. Suddenly, as they came out into the open, a cry went up from Pomp.

"Golly, Marse Frank! Dere am de air-ship comin' fo' all it is worth!"

This was quickly seen to be the truth. The Catamaran of the Air was distant not quite half a mile and was skimming along through the air not more than twenty feet above the ground.

It was coming straight toward the three adventurers, and soon was within hailing distance.

Dr. Vaneyke was seen to be in the pilot-house, and almost in that moment he saw the party of adventurers.

At once Prof. Philosophus was seen at the rail making gestures, and then the catamaran settled down not but a few yards from the party. In a few moments they were on board.

It was a joyful meeting.

Explanations were quickly made. It seemed that the two scientists had first been attacked by the bushmen.

A hard battle had followed, and the catamaran was obliged to ascend. Then they had gone in quest of the others.

But there was no need of any fear for the bushmen now.

They were able to set them at defiance. Sailing far above the woods in which they were, Frank brought an electric bomb from the cabin.

This he dropped down among the trees. The result was a terrific explosion.

Trees and earth were hurled high into the air. Whether any of the bushmen were killed or not it was difficult to say. But they were certainly given a great scare, for nothing more was seen of them.

Far to the northward extended the desolate Emu Plains.

Across this the air-ship began to make its course. But the thrilling incidents of the day were not over by any means.

In the meanwhile, however, Barney and

Pomp had a little celebration of their own. They were both in high spirits.

Barney had it in for Pomp and had long been studying up a scheme of revenge for a practical joke the latter had worked upon him some while previous.

As the Catamaran sailed away over the desolate plains Pomp appeared on deck with his banjo.

He played and sang for some while with great gusto and to the amusement of the others. Barney listened with an ironical smile upon his face.

"Bejabers, it's out av the other side av his mouth he'll be afther laughing wan av these days!" he muttered. "Shure, an' it's not so far off as that aither. Av I don't get square wid dat coon dis time, then me name is not Barney O'Shea. That's all!"

CHAPTER V.

EXCITING INCIDENTS.

POMP sang to his heart's content and until everybody else had their fill.

He was in the midst of the "Old Kentucky Home" when Barney stuffed his dudene in his pocket and cried :

"Howld up wid yer iverlastin' noise, will yez iver! Shure that's the hundredth toime ye've sang that tune. Give us a rest!"

Pomp brought his hand across the banjo strings with a crash and glared at Barney.

"Wha' fo' am dat any bizness ob yo's?" he cried, hotly. "Yo' bettah bring out yo' old fiddle and jes' pizen de hull crowd ob us fo' sure!"

"Begorra, there's more music in an Oirish jig than any of yer high-falutin' plantation melodies, an' I'll leave it to the crowd!"

"Yo' don' know no mo' about musick dan a ole cow!" cried Pomp, in disgust. "Yo' ole fiddle would jes' wake de dead, dat it would!"

"Bejabers, it's only heavenly music will do that!" retorted Barney, with a laugh.

Irish wit was too much for Pomp.

He made a dive at Barney, but the Celt got out of the way.

Barney went into the engine-room and Pomp went into the galley to prepare the evening meal.

For a long time Pomp had suspected Barney of carrying about with him a bottle of choice whisky.

But for some reason or other the Celt would never ask the darky to drink.

Pomp was very thirsty these days, and as a result he had some days before spent some time in searching Barney's bunk, with the result of finding a flask of choicest stuff.

The darky took a swig and went on deck. He watched Barney do the same. After a time he got thirsty again and went in for another dram.

This one was a copious one. Somehow the darky's lips became glued to the neck of the bottle and he would not let go until nearly all was gone.

The Celt was dumfounded to find so much of the liquor gone.

"Shure, that's powerful quarel!" he muttered. "On me sowl I never drank the whole av thot. Shure, the bottle don't leak!"

A short while later, on deck, Barney caught Pomp's breath and dropped to the truth at once.

Barney was mad and inclined to jump on the darky for it. But he restrained his temper wisely and muttered:

"Be jabers, there's a betther way to fix that chap, an' I'll do it."

So the Celt filled the flask with the same grade of liquor from a chest which he carried. But in the liquor he diffused a decoction of jalap and some other sickening articles.

"Holy Vargin! but I'll fix the thafe this time!" he muttered.

So he left the bottle upon a shelf in the cooking galley, along with some crumbs of pie and dry bread.

The moment Pomp entered the galley, he spied the bottle and the remnants of the repast.

It was a neat trap, nicely baited.

"Golly!" he muttered. "Here am jes' a good one on dat fishman. I done learn him bettah dan to come in here an' steal mah pie. He hab lef' his bottle here, an' jes' to git squar wif him I'll jes' drink it all up!"

And Pomp proceeded to do this. The contents of the bottle were transferred to his stomach in quick time.

At first the liquor warmed his stomach, and he felt much better. But presently he was very sorry.

The jalap began to get in its work, and a sicker coon was never seen.

"Mah goodness!" groaned the darky, "I wonder if I hab made a mistake and took poison. I nevah was so sick afore!"

Pomp collapsed with the powerful nausea, and actually rolled over upon the floor. At this moment in came Barney.

The Celt feigned great excitement, and pretending not to notice Pomp made a dive for the shelf where the bottle had been.

"Begorra, it's gone!" he cried, with feigned consternation. "Shure, I'll break the head av the rascal what sthole it, that I will!"

Then he turned and saw Pomp.

"Tare an' ounds! What's the matter wid yez, naygur?"

"I'm dyin', fo' suah!" groaned Pomp. "Send fo' a minister! Ise done gwine to pass in mah chips!"

Only the most strenuous of efforts kept Barney from exploding with laughter. The darky in spite of his sickness saw this effort and a suspicion of the truth flashed upon him.

In a moment he was the maddest darky on earth, or rather above the earth.

"Golly fo' glory! Darn yo' ole skin, yo' Iish mucker! Yo' done put somefin' in dat bottle fo' to make me sick."

"Oho!" crowed Barney. "So yez are the thief what has been drhinkin' all av me whisky lately. Be jabers, an' av it has med ye sick it's just upon ye fer havin' so weak a stomach!"

Then roaring with laughter Barney made a break for the upper deck.

If Pomp had been in his accustomed strength at that moment, it would have fared hard indeed with the Irish joker.

But the darky was too weak and sick to pursue his foe. Presently, however, he began to retch and vomit, and this relieved the nausea greatly.

But it was some hours before he was able to get about.

Barney was compelled to spread the supper, and Pomp did not show up until next morning.

When he came on deck he was quite a sober darky, but internally he was seething with plans of revenge.

"If I don' jes' gib dat Irishman a soakin', den my name ain' no good!" he muttered. "I'll fix him fo' suah!"

And thus for a time the matter rested; but Barney was not so foolish as to believe that his dark-skinned confrebre would soon forget the joke.

The air-ship, with the coming of another day was yet above boundless deserts.

During the morning much time was spent in making scientific observations. So engrossed were all in this that a little mishap which befell the air-ship was not for a moment noted.

Suddenly there came a tremendous shock. Everybody was prostrated. Movable articles were thrown about, and it seemed as if the Catamaran was going to pieces.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was quickly upon his feet and rushed to the rail.

He saw what was the trouble at once. The rotascopes were flying rapidly as was the propeller, but the Catamaran was not moving.

The anchor had in some way slipped from its davit, and the line paying out quickly it had fallen one hundred feet to the earth below.

Dragging but a few feet the kedge had caught in some roots and held the Catamaran safely moored.

It was a fortunate thing that the shock had injured none of the delicate electrical machinery.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Professor Philosophus, pulling himself together, "I thought we had come in collision with a planet."

"I was sure we had fallen to the earth!" said Dr. Vaneyke.

"Golly!" cried Pomp. "I done fought dis was a gone coon fo' suah. But wherebber is we anyway, Marse Frank?"

"Sure enough!" cried the young inventor. "Where are we and what sort of a place is this."

Singularly enough during the morning a thick wall of mist had been advancing to the westward.

This now came upon the air-ship all in a moment.

The mist was so thick that it would have seemed not a difficult job to cut it with a knife.

The explorers could hardly see each other on the deck.

"Well," cried Prof. Ferry, "here is a pretty fix. What are we to do?"

"We cannot go ahead," remarked Dr. Vaneyke.

"Why?"

"It is not safe."

"Indeed! Will you please explain why it is not safe?" asked the English savant.

"Simply for this reason," said Frank Reade, Jr. "It would be difficult to tell whether an obstruction was in our path or not."

"An obstruction in mid-air?"

"Certainly. Some mountain peaks might tower above us, or some tall tree. It is quite impossible to keep the ship at the necessary elevation."

"I acknowledge the cause," said Prof. Ferry, with a laugh; "the compass is no use in this case. Well, we are safely anchored."

"Yes!"

"We need fear nothing right here?"

"Certainly not!"

"But I have a longing to put my foot on mother earth again!" said Dr. Vaneyke. "Will it be safe to descend?"

"Of course!" replied Frank, readily. "Let the air-ship down, Barney. It will be a good chance for me to examine the dynamos. But I would advise that nobody leave the air-ship while this fog lasts!"

"Which is good advice," said Ferry. "We will heed it."

Barney turned the lever on the keyboard and the air-ship began to descend.

Soon it rested upon the earth.

The anchor cable was taken in and the an-

chor secured. Then the fog began to gently lift.

Frank was busy with the dynamos.

Near by was a thick patch of woods. The two scientists were desirous of exploring them in the interest of natural history.

They explained the situation to Frank who said :

"It will be all right if you will not get lost."

"We will take good care," they said.

Then, armed and equipped, they left the airship. Soon they were in the forest.

Certainly it was an excellent field for the naturalist.

Upon every hand they encountered new specimens, and rapidly added to their collection. So interested did they become that they gave little heed of time or as to where their footsteps were leading them.

Deeper into the forest they wandered. Suddenly Ferry gave a sharp cry.

"Look here, Vaneyke!" he cried. "Here is the mouth of a cavern. Wonder where it leads to?"

"A cavern!" cried Vaneyke, at once interested.

The doctor was an expert geologist, and he was at once interested. In a moment he was at Ferry's side.

Sure enough, there in the side of the hill, deep among the foliage of trees and scrub growth, was the mouth of a cave.

From what could be seen of it there was good reason to believe that it was a deep one.

But the entrance was completely choked up with underbrush and saplings.

"It is certainly a cavern," said Dr. Vaneyke. "How can we enter it, Ferry?"

"Enter it?"

"Yes."

"Easy enough, if you really want to."

"But why should we not?"

"Ugh! There might be a tiger or a panther in there!"

"Pshaw! Don't you see its mouth is completely closed?"

"Sure enough. We will explore it, if you wish."

"But how can we enter?"

"I will show you."

Ferry drew a sharp knife and began to cut away the underbrush. In a few moments he had made some progress toward the entrance.

Vaneyke took hold of it also, and both scientists worked away with a will.

In a short while they had a passage cut through the undergrowth. After this all was clear sailing.

They crept into the mouth of the cavern. For a brief ways it was dimly lighted by cracks in the roof.

But suddenly Vaneyke gave a backward leap and a cry of wildest terror.

CHAPTER VI.

A PREHISTORIC DISCOVERY.

The cause of Dr. Vaneyke's terror was the sudden appearance of a peril right in their path.

A pair of gleaming fire-balls shone through the darkness. That they belonged to a tiger or panther the doctor felt sure.

At the same moment a hissing sound filled the air.

"Look out, Ferry!" yelled the doctor. "It's a tiger, I think."

But the Englishman needed no adjuration.

He had started for the mouth of the cave, but Dr. Vaneyke, acting upon a curious im-

pulse, raised his rifle quick as a flash and fired.

Boom!

The report was like that of thunder in the recesses of the cavern. The effect was thrilling in the extreme.

There was a fierce, wild shriek, and the next moment Dr. Vaneyke was felled to the ground.

He felt sharp claws and a hairy body upon him, and he was making a desperate struggle for his life.

But that leap of the animal was its last.

The bullet fired from the doctor's gun had entered a vital part, and the animal was dead even as he struck his intended victim with his body.

Dr. Vaneyke scrambled to his feet in great excitement.

"Hold on, Ferry!" he shouted. "I've killed the beast!"

But the Englishman had already reached his side with the intention of helping him to defend himself.

"Thank heaven!" he cried, "then you are uninjured, doctor?"

"Oh, yes, quite!"

"What sort of an animal is it?"

"I don't know. We will drag him out to the light."

And this they proceeded to do. In the outer air the animal was revealed as a most strange-looking creature, half between a lynx and a panther.

"What will we call it, doctor?" asked the professor.

"Give it up!" replied Dr. Vaneyke, puzzled. "It is a species I have never seen or heard of."

"Nor I!"

"It might be well to note this down and record it when we get home."

This was done.

Now that this dangerous occupant of the cave was disposed of, the two scientists began to consider the possibility of further exploration.

"But it is very dark in this cavern!" declared Ferry. "We had better invent some kind of a light, doctor."

"Right!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "And here is just the thing, an electric lantern, storage battery, small enough to be carried in the pocket, the invention of that wonderful man, Frank Reade, Jr."

"He is a wonderful fellow."

"You are right there."

Dr. Vaneyke produced the lantern, which was, indeed, a wonderful invention of Frank Reade, Jr's."

The electric lantern gave quite a sufficiency of light, and Dr. Vaneyke led the way into the cavern.

Passing through a narrow corridor, they entered quite a large cavern chamber. Here the rays of the small lantern were hardly sufficient to light up the large area.

But such as was revealed in their light was grand beyond description.

There were pillars of a variety of stone, resembling jasper and onyx, and even the priceless emerald. These gleamed clear and bright, probably for the first time in artificial light, as the scientists thought.

But a few moments later they were undeceived.

"On my word, Ferry!" exclaimed Dr. Vaneyke, "this really exceeds anything for beauty that I have ever seen."

"You are right, doctor," agreed the Englishman. "Truly no one would have thought of

looking for such beauty and richness underground."

"What do you call the formation here?"

"Evidently of the pliocene order, or the upper tertiary deposit. We should find some evidence of saurian life here."

"Let us test the stratum. Ah! What sort of a rock would you call this?"

Dr. Vaneyke paused before one of the onyx pillars.

He was examining it closely in the light of the electric lantern. Suddenly he gave a sharp exclamation:

"Upon my word," he cried, "this is very singular!"

In a moment Ferry was by his side.

"What?" exclaimed Prof. Philosophus. "What is the matter?"

But the English scientist saw in that moment what was the cause of his confrere's excitement.

Deep cut in the hard surface of the pillar was an inscription. It embraced several lines of a style approaching the Runic.

The two scientists studied it a moment in silence. Then they exchanged glances.

"This is a revelation!" said Dr. Vaneyke.

"You are right."

"Human hands certainly cut that inscription in the rock."

"And that proves that this cavern was once the abode of human beings."

The minds of both scientists seemed united upon this point. It was certainly a mighty interesting revelation.

They clasped hands in a frenzy of delight.

"We have made a mighty discovery!" cried Prof. Philosophus, excitedly. "It will pin our names high upon the pinnacle of fame!"

"We are the discoverers of sure evidence of the existence of a prehistoric people in North Australia."

"What will the archaeological world say?"

The two scientists were literally boiling over with delight at the prospect before them. In that moment forgotten were the catamaran and their companions—forgotten all else but the engrossing study before them.

At once they began to explore the cavern chamber.

Abundant evidences were found that the cavern had certainly once been the abode of a prehistoric people.

There were hieroglyphics upon the walls, heaps of flint arrow-heads and stone axes and many other interesting things found.

Suddenly, in examining the walls of the chamber, Dr. Vaneyke saw a peculiar line extending seemingly through the stone. He drew his knife and with the point pricked this away.

A crevice was revealed, and he saw that it was but plaster, and that it surrounded a flat stone set in the wall.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Come here, Ferry. Here is a discovery."

"What?"

"I hardly know, but I think I shall soon be able to tell you."

Then the doctor began to pry away the cement with his knife.

In a few moments he had the crevice around the stone open, and a few seconds later he pushed the slab in. The revelation was a most surprising one.

An aperture or open space cut in the solid rock was revealed, and there in a heap of dust lay a moldering skeleton.

A little further examination showed that the cavern was really a vast sepulcher or cata-

combs. More than two hundred of the sepulchers cut in the rock were counted.

The skeleton was carefully examined.

It was found to be very ancient and almost in a complete state of dissolution. The shape of the skull was a trifle abnormal as compared with the Caucasian.

But it showed evidence that the owner had presumably been possessed of intelligence and good gifts.

The other sepulchers were not opened by the scientists.

It would have consumed a great deal of time, and they were anxious to pass on to other things.

Thus far they had taken no note of the time.

They had been for hours absent from the airship though they little realized it. But the thought of a return did not occur to either.

There was too glorious a prospect of scientific research before them, and they proceeded to follow it up.

The main chamber or crypt had been examined as they supposed. But now upon passing into a passage beyond they came upon a mighty arched cavern which extended an unknown distance into the center of the earth.

What was more quite a large stream of water flowed through this. Its shores were sandy and shelving, and the two explorers adjudged it a genuine underground river.

To what depths it flowed, or what its outlet they had no means of knowing.

The flash of the electric lantern lit up the surface of the water in a gloomy fashion.

"Let us follow the shore for a ways," said Dr. Vaneyke. "I have some curiosity to see how far it goes!"

"All right," agreed Ferry. "We surely cannot get lost, for we have only to follow the river right back."

"That is so!"

So the two scientists set out along the river bank.

They kept on for some while until finally the river entered a narrow passage. Here they came to a halt.

They had been examining the sands for some signs of the pliocene deposits, and had been so intent in the quest, that they had become oblivious of surroundings.

Suddenly Ferry gave a sharp cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Dr. Vaneyke.

"Look!"

Ferry pointed to an impression in the soft soil. It was the exact imprint of a human foot.

"Heavens!" gasped Vaneyke in utter amazement. "It is a human foot-print!"

"Yes!"

"And freshly made!"

"Yes!"

The two astounded men gazed at each other for a moment silently.

Then they carefully examined the foot-print again.

There was no disputing the fact that it had been freshly made. It implied much to them.

For it proved that some human being had passed that way but a short time previous.

"What do you make of it, Professor?" asked the doctor.

"What do I think of it?"

"Yes."

"I think that there are other human beings in this cavern, and—"

"What?"

"It may mean that some of the prehistoric race yet live here!"

The two scientists were much excited. The

same thoughts ran in the mind of each. In that moment both were anxious for a look at the underground people.

Their wish was gratified in a manner which did not exactly suit them.

Suddenly a yellow light shone all about them, and turning, the two men beheld an astounding spectacle.

A score of men, white as the driven snow, skin, hair and all, without a vestment save a breech cloth, were rushing toward them excitedly.

What was most astonishing about these people was the fact that their bodies were luminous, and this strange yellow light which emanated from them was sufficient to enable them to go anywhere in the darkness of the cavern.

Their manner was fierce, and brandishing primitive weapons they rushed upon the two scientists.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PEOPLE OF LIGHT.

A MORE astounding spectacle the two scientists never beheld.

The People of Light, for such they might be fitly called, had rushed toward them with apparently hostile intention.

"Great heavens!" gasped Ferry. "What a predicament! What shall we do, Vaneyke?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the doctor in indecision. "I don't want to shoot."

"But they evidently mean to do us harm."

"What on earth are they? Certainly they are flesh and blood."

A crude or superstitious mind might have been excused for taking the strange people for supernatural beings.

Their bodies were so luminous that a halo of light was shed about them, which was most effulgent and weird.

White as driven snow they were, with forms perfect in symmetry and graceful in contour. Certainly they were angelic in all appearance.

Dr. Vaneyke threw up his hands as a sign of friendliness, and made gestures to that effect. The strange, underground people had made hostile manifestations in the first place, but now their manner curiously changed.

They halted not a dozen yards distant and also held up their hands. This was certainly in token of amity, and the two scientists felt greatly relieved.

Dr. Vaneyke dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground.

"Lucky I did not fire," he said. "They are friendly, professor."

"So it seems. What a mighty discovery for us! Our fortunes are made, Vaneyke, as well as our fame."

"Wonderful beings, are they not?"

"Beyond all description!"

Indeed, so engrossed were the two savants in the wonderful character and appearance of the strange people that they did not observe the conduct of one of them who had advanced from the throng for some moments.

He was a powerful built fellow, handsome and straight as an arrow. There was a pleasant smile upon his face, and he held up his hands in token of peaceful intentions.

When the scientists did see him, Vaneyke gave a start and exclaimed:

"A truce! It is evident that they want to parley with us, Ferry."

"Let us hear what he has to say," said Prof. Philosophus, adjusting his eye-glasses.

The truce-bearer halted a few yards distant and made a low bow. Then he spoke in a

silvery voice but a strange tongue, wholly unintelligible to his listeners.

The two scientists shook their heads to indicate that they did not understand. Then they made signs.

The fellow watched the motions of their hands eagerly.

He had all the appearance of an intelligent chap, and seemed quick to divine their sign talk. It was not many moments before quite a system of conversation by signs was established.

The others watched the result with eagerness and interest.

"Who are you?" the fellow asked by sign talk, "and what do you want in this cavern?"

It required some time and effort for Dr. Vaneyke to make comprehensive answer.

"You have come from the outer world?" at length the undergrotnd nomad asked.

The doctor nodded in acquiescence.

"Do you make war upon us?"

"No," replied the doctor emphatically, in sign talk. "We are friends. You need not fear us."

The fellow seemed pleased and smiled, showing his teeth in a peculiar fashion. Yet his manner was not warm or cordial, or by any means reassuring to the two scientists.

He turned about and conversed for some moments in a strange jargon with his companions. Prof. Ferry shrugged his shoulders.

"Upon my word, Vaneyke," he said, "I don't like the outlook. I don't believe we will ever be able to make friends with these people."

"You don't?"

"No."

"I cannot see why."

"But I can. That fellow does not show sincerity in any line of his face. But can you explain what gives that luminous appearance to the skin?"

"I think I can," replied Dr. Vaneyke, quickly. "Watch the evolutions of yonder fellow."

One of the strange race seemed to be engaged in rubbing a luminous kind of oil upon his body from a pouch containing the same, which he carried at his belt. It was seen that all the People of Light carried these pouches.

"He is anointing himself with that luminous liquid," declared Ferry, with amazement. "That is what gives them the luminous appearance, Vaneyke, as sure as you live."

"Certainly!"

"They are otherwise but as you and I."

"I believe it."

"But what sort of a preparation can that be?"

"It looks to me like a phosphorescent oil, which it may be they obtain somewhere in this cavern."

"You are right."

Whether the scientists had hit the truth or not they had no means of determining at that moment. Startling incidents for a moment claimed their attention.

The result of the cave-dweller's communion with his fellows was now made manifest. Two of them, carrying curious-looking emblems made of pottery in their hands, now approached.

They advanced with stately tread until within a dozen feet of the two visitors. They then made several strange signs, and kneeling held the emblems up as if to present them to the strangers.

But Dr. Vaneyke and Ferry stood motionless. They did not comprehend the move and were at a loss what to do.

The result was startling.

In an instant the two priests, if such they

were, were upon their feet, angrily flourishing the emblems and uttering a harsh chant. The entire body of cave-dwellers rushed forward.

The scientists saw in a moment that something was wrong,

It was not unlikely that their failure to comply with the ceremony, through their ignorance of its meaning, was likely to cost them their lives.

"Great heavens!" gasped the doctor, "what shall we do, Philosopher?"

"They mean to kill us. We must defend our lives!"

With which the professor in his excitement raised his rifle and fired. One of the cave-dwellers dropped. Another fell before Dr. Vaneyke's rifle.

This was a declaration of war and a desperate fight followed.

It did not seem to be the intent of the cave-dwellers to kill their adversaries. Indeed, they did not use their weapons at all, but closing in upon them, Dr. Vaneyke and Ferry were prisoners in a jiffy.

"By Jupiter, we are lost!" cried Vaneyke, despairingly; "this is the end of us, Ferry!"

"Have courage! We may escape!"

"I don't see the way. They will never let us off alive now!"

The scientists now regretted that they had not submitted to capture in the first place. The cave-dwellers would now be sure to avenge the death of their comrades.

There was no way, however, but to make the best of it, and this the two scientists proceeded to do.

The cave-dwellers overpowered them and took from them their weapons. The rifles, the use of which was to them an enigma, were thrown into the river.

Then, amid much excitement, the two prisoners were led away, deeper into the cavern.

Along the bank of the underground river they were led for what seemed miles. Then a great blaze of light was seen ahead.

As this drew nearer, the walls of a mighty cavern chamber were revealed, all ablaze with the same strange luminous oil with which the cave-dwellers were anointed.

It was a scene beautiful beyond description. To one coming from the upper world the transition would seem like a heavenly one, with a palace and people of sacred light.

The two scientists were spellbound. However, their first surmises proved correct as to the luminous oil, for they passed a huge bubbling spring of it, which issued from the earth and flowed into the river. This gave to the stream, for a great distance below, the appearance of a river of fire.

It was not likely, however, that this would have been perceived in daylight, for the phosphorescent oil would show its luminosity only in darkness most intense.

The walls of the cavern chamber were pierced by openings leading into chambers beyond. Hundreds of the cave-dwellers were in view, and as far as the eye could reach their curious dwellings extended.

It was a strange and wonderful underground race and city, and the two scientists gazed upon the scene spellbound.

But the idea of escape was uppermost in the mind of each. Upon the sands by the river's edge there were drawn up a number of curiously constructed coracles, made apparently of skins drawn over ribs of wood.

Vaneyke saw these first and exchanged glances with Ferry. They were guarded only by three men, the rest of the party being with

the two priests just ahead, going through some outlandish rites, as a greeting to the vast crowd of cave-dwellers beyond.

"Ferry," Dr. Vaneyke suddenly whispered, "be ready! I have a plan for escape."

CHAPTER VIII.

POMP'S WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

FRANK READE, JR., had been loath to see the two scientists leave the catamaran upon their expedition.

He knew of the perils of the wild region, and the possibilities of some catastrophe overtaking them.

"I am afraid they will go astray in this fog!" he declared. "Upon my word, I am sorry they have gone!"

"On my wo'd, sah," said Pomp, "I done fink it am de foolishest fing I eber heern tell ob. I spees I knows better dan dat mahse'f."

"Begorra, if anythin' happens to thim, just let thim take the consiquences!" declared Barney, vigorously.

"We cannot do that!" said Frank, reprovingly. "It is our duty to look after them."

But Barney and Pomp retired into one corner of the catamaran and mutually berated the folly of the two scientists.

"Dem fellers ain' jes' got no sense 'tall," declared Pomp, vigorously. "Dey don' know nuff fo' to cum in when it rains."

"Bejabers, it's a woise mon yez are, naygur!" said Barney, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "Av thim min only had yure brains now, shure they'd niver want anythin' more."

Barney's sarcasm was not relished a bit by the darky.

"Huh! Don' yo' talk nuffin' 'bout it, I'ish!" he grunted. "Yo' amn't smaht 'nuff fo' to spell yo' name backwards. I jes' larned to do dat debery fus' ting an' fore eber I learned to spell it frontwards, sah!"

"Begorra, I'll bet yez a pointav whisky that yez can't spell it aither way," cried Barney.

But before the two roysterers could get deeper into the argument, a startling thing occurred.

A whiff of wind came suddenly down upon the catamaran's deck, a moaning sound filled the air, and as if by magic the fog lifted.

Then a thrilling sight was revealed. Far out over the face of the country trees were seen to be uprooted, water was swept into mid-air, while piles of debris and a great yellow cloud seemed swooping down upon the catamaran.

Frank Reade saw the truth at once that a mighty tornado was swooping down upon them, and a wild cry of terror escaped him.

"Barney! Pomp!" he shouted. "To the cab in for your lives!"

"Begorra, it's lost we air!" cried Barney, wildly.

But Frank Reade, Jr., rushed into the pilot-house and turned the ascending lever. The rotascopes began to whirl, and up into the air leaped the catamaran.

It was not a moment too soon. At that moment the blast struck one end of the air-ship.

The effect was thrilling. For an instant the catamaran seemed likely to go over. Only the speed of the rotascopes saved it.

Barney had reached the engine room and stood by the dynamos ready for duty.

Pomp had not been so fortunate.

The darky had started to follow his confrere. But just as the blast struck the catamaran, he lost his balance, fell against the rail, and was overboard in a second.

With the instinct of a falling man, Pomp clutched for something to hold to and his fin

gers closed over a rope. He did not know what it was part of, but instinctively clung to it.

It was really a part of the rigging of the after rotoscope shaft which had become detached, and as he clung to it, he was some twelve feet from the bottom of the air-ship, swinging in mid-air.

He was in imminent peril of being dashed to the ground and killed at any moment, but with the conviction of a desperate man he hung to the rope.

The catamaran was now wholly in the grasp of the cyclone. Through the air it was hurled like a top.

How far it was thus swept it was not easy to say, but Pomp suddenly became aware of an awful conviction.

The rope to which he was clinging was parting, and he was sure to be precipitated to the earth.

The darky felt that this must be certain death, and with a fearful cry of anguish he endeavored to get a better hold. But his efforts were in vain.

There was a sudden snap, the rope parted and he went down through space. But as good fortune had it, the darky had not far to fall.

The catamaran was not more than fifty feet in the air at the moment. A lake was just below, and into its waters Pomp was precipitated.

Down into the foaming waters went the terrified darky. Instinctively he made a stroke and came quickly to the surface.

It was with the greatest of efforts that Pomp was enabled to keep up, the waters of the lake were lashed so terribly by the cyclone.

But a storm of its character is never long of duration, and soon the wind began to subside almost as quickly as it came.

The darkness passed away, the air was calm, the sun was shining and the churning waters had subsided almost into a calm.

But the face of the country presented a peculiar spectacle. The ravages of the tornado were fearful beyond description.

Pomp saw that he was fully a half mile from shore.

He was quite exhausted and did not feel equal to the exertion. However, his gaze lit upon what seemed to him to be a black round-topped rock protruding above the surface of the lake not many yards away.

To the exhausted darky it presented an opportunity for rest, and he at once swam over to it.

Its surface was smoothly polished and slippery and it was with difficulty that he crawled out upon it.

Several times he fancied that it moved beneath his weight, but he sank down upon it at length glad to find a resting place. For some while he remained thus.

"Golly!" he mused. "I wondah what hab become ob de catamaran an' ob Marse Frank an' Barney? I done fink dey mus' come back to look fo' dis chile."

Then Pomp scanned the sky eagerly for some trace of the air-ship.

But he saw none, and was finally obliged to give it up.

He felt drowsy, and possibly might have taken a nap then and there, had it not been for a startling incident.

Suddenly the water about the rock began to boil. Indeed, the rock itself swayed and seemed moving through the water.

The darky was astonished as well as alarmed. He sprang up.

"Golly! What am de mattah?" he muttered. "Is it a airthquake, or what am it?"

But an explanation was at that moment accorded the darky.

Out of the water there obtruded a huge head.

Then Pomp saw that what he had regarded as a rock was really a monster specimen of a turtle.

The astonishment of the darky can well be imagined.

His first startled impulse was to leap into the water, but second thought showed him the folly of this.

So long as the turtle remained upon the surface, the safest spot was upon his back. So the darky, with keen presence of mind, continued to cling to his hold.

The turtle seemed fully as much alarmed as the darky.

It had struck a bee-line for the shore and was making rapid speed. Pomp saw a hard problem easily solved.

"Massy sakes!" he muttered, "dis am done gwine fo' to sabe me a good swim, dat am suah. I jes' stick to dis ole chap's back, and when I gits ashore, I jes' drops off!"

With this conclusion, the darky's spirits arose. Indeed, so jubilant was he that he began to dance a double-shuffle on the turtle's back.

This only served to accelerate the speed of the monster.

"Dat am de way!" screamed Pomp. "Jes' yo' go right along, ole turkle! Take dis chile right to de shore cl'ar to rights."

Nearer the shore they drew. The turtle evidently fancied it his only way to get rid of his load, and at once rushed out of the water upon the sandy shore.

Pomp's weight was but as a feather upon the strong back of the turtle. But as soon as the shore was reached, the darky leaped down and cut for cover.

He plunged into the forest and did not stop until he had run fully a mile. Then he came into a well-beaten path.

"Golly!" he muttered, "I wondah wherebber dis leads to!"

His curiosity led him on, and suddenly reaching the summit of a small and rocky hill, he beheld a thrilling sight.

Below him, upon a sort of table land, he saw a walled city, built of a peculiar kind of sand-stone, with streets and squares, roofs and minarets, of a rude fashion.

A strange-looking people were visible even at that distance upon the walls of the city. For a moment the darky was dumfounded.

He could hardly believe his eyesight.

Here, deep in the heart of Northern Australia, was a walled city, inhabitants apparently semi-civilized, or at least versed in many arts. An undreamed of, an almost absolutely unheard of wonder this surely was.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRUITLESS QUEST.

NEITHER Frank Reade nor Barney dreamed of the fate of Pomp. Both were too much engrossed in their duties to think of aught else.

The catamaran was carried for miles over the land ridges until suddenly a lull enabled it to spring aloft.

Up it went like a rocket for over a mile. Then into the sunlight it burst.

Below all was a yellow, heaving cloud contiguous to the earth. The catamaran was safe above the storm.

Frank and Barney came out on the storm-swept deck.

Both were pale yet from the effects of their experience. Certainly theirs had been a narrow escape.

"Great heavens! how that blast did toss us about!" cried Frank.

"Bejabers, I never knew whether I was on me head or me feet from first to last!" declared Barney.

"I can say the same," said Frank, sincerely; "but where is Pomp?"

For the first time they had thought of the darky.

He was not in sight.

"Pomp!" cried Frank, loudly; "where are you? Answer!"

The call must have gone from one end of the catamaran to the other. But no answer came back.

Barney and Frank exchanged glances.

"Quick!" cried the young inventor. "Look everywhere! See if he is on board!"

"All roight, sor!"

Barney was not slow to obey.

He went quickly from one end of the catamaran to the other. But not a trace of Pomp could be found.

"Och hone!" cried Barney, in tones of distress. "Phawtiver has become of the naygur? Shure an' I believe that he has tumbled overboard."

"My God!" gasped Frank, "then he may be dead!"

Both were appalled with this idea. However, there was no way but to turn back and look for the missing man.

Accordingly the catamaran was allowed to descend to a lower stratum of atmosphere. The storm had now passed.

But Barney in looking over the rail saw the rope dangling below, and a great cry escaped his lips.

The rope was quickly drawn up, and upon examination the conclusion was reached that its breaking had let Pomp fall to the earth. The truth was easily guessed.

Nothing remained now but to find the darky's body, if, as was believed, he had met death in the fall.

So the catamaran was sent on the backward course.

It happened that the air-ship had been driven in an opposite course, so that in the return the region traversed by Pomp was not covered else the darky might have seen the catamaran.

The air-ship was kept but a short distance above the earth, and careful scrutiny was made by Frank while Barney presided at the wheel.

In this manner the ground was thoroughly covered.

But no trace of Pomp was found. Frank began to grow discouraged.

"I am afraid we will never be able to find him!" he muttered. "It is probable that his body has fallen in some out-of-the-way place, and it is looking for a needle in a haystack to find it."

Indeed, Barney was of this same opinion. But he would not relinquish hope.

"Shure, an' I want to see the naygur have dacint burial!" he said, wiping moisture from his eyes. "It's finds we've been for a long toime, Misther Frank."

"That is true, Barney," agreed the young inventor. "It nearly breaks my heart to think of harm having come to Pomp."

Finally the catamaran hovered over a dense tract of forest.

It was thought that possibly the body might be deep in the underbrush, and as it could

hardly be seen from the decks of the catamaran, it was decided to descend.

It was done, and the air-ship was securely anchored. Then the two adventurers began their search.

But it proved, as ever, a fruitless one. After hours of patient toil, they emerged from the forest.

"It's of no use," said Frank. "We'll have to give it up, Barney."

"Shure, sor, an' I believe ye're roight," agreed the Celt, reluctantly. "Well, may the Lord rest his soul! He had a black skin, but shure his heart was white!"

So the quest was abandoned. Pomp was given up, and now the two adventurers were beginning to turn their thoughts to other matters.

They could certainly pursue their search for the two scientists. They were no doubt alive, and perhaps at the spot where the catamaran had formerly been, waiting for its return.

Frank was not quite sure that he could find his way back to the spot. While reflecting upon the matter his attention was suddenly claimed by matters closer at hand.

There was a wild yell from Barney and a rifle-shot.

Then Frank saw the Celt come flying down an incline in a state of wildest terror.

"Tare an'ounds!" he yelled. "Luk out fer yerself, Misther Frank!"

"What is the matter?" thundered the young inventor. "What on earth ails you?"

"Bejabers, luk fer yerself!"

And the excited Celt pointed up the hillside. Frank felt a thrill of alarm.

Down the slope came a huge serpent of the water species. It was gliding along slowly and sinuously, with its huge head uplifted.

It was certainly a monster, being fully eighteen or twenty feet long. Whether it was of a poisonous variety or not Frank did not know.

Its size warranted the exercising of due caution, and the young inventor drew back the hammer of his rifle.

"Egad!" he exclaimed, "he is as big as a boa constrictor!"

"Don't yez let him get nearer, Mister Frank," cried Barney. "If yez do, he'll surely charm yez."

The young inventor placed no credence in this declaration. He experienced a strange desire to see what the reptile would do and so refrained from shooting.

The monster was gliding along slowly and in an inquiring way.

It did not seem to be cognizant of the presence of its foes. Slowly its coils slid down the hillside.

It was a strangely beautiful reptile, being marked in a peculiar fashion with prism-shaped patterns of various colors.

Truly it was beautiful to the eye, despite the instinctive sense of aversion felt for a snake.

Nearer the reptile drew and Frank Reade, Jr., impelled by some impulse, continued to watch it.

Suddenly the snake turned its head, and coming to a halt fixed its gaze upon Frank.

Unwittingly the young inventor returned that gaze. In that moment he was lost.

He was almost instantly made powerless to move and wholly oblivious of his surroundings.

It was not the first time in his life that Frank had been charmed by a snake. He knew his fate, but was powerless to avert it.

And there he was, held under the devilish influence of that deadly eye.

A strange, ecstatic thrill of pleasure swept over him. He was entranced—bewitched, and as powerless to move as if dead.

Then a deadly nausea seized him—a frightful, awful sense of death.

Nearer the reptile drew, with its glistening orbs fixed upon its intended victim.

And in that moment Barney saw the truth and cried wildly:

"Misther Frank, phwat are yez doin'? Oh, murtha! The snake has charmed him!"

Quick as a flash the Celt's rifle went to his shoulder.

There was a sharp report and the great sinuous body went whirling down the hill minus a head.

But Frank was saved. The spell was broken. He sank down overcome.

"Great God, Barney!" he exclaimed; "but for you I should be dead now!"

"Och hone, Misther Frank, an' I know that well enough!" cried the Celt. "Shure, come with me down to the river near here and get some wather."

It was not far to a swift-rushing river, and as they reached the banks, both were astonished to see that it ran out of a mighty orifice in the mountain side.

"Bejabers, it's an underground river!" cried Barney.

Then both stood still, petrified with a thrilling sight. Out from the cavern, borne upon the swift current, there suddenly swept a light, dancing coracle.

And in it were two men. It required but a glance for Frank and Barney to recognize them as the two scientists, Prof. Philosophus Ferry and Dr. Vaneyke.

CHAPTER X.

THE PYRAMID SPRINGS.

The astounding appearance of Ferry and Dr. Vaneyke in the coracle for a moment almost paralyzed Barney and Frank.

Indeed, so great an effect did it have upon the young inventor that he almost instantly recovered from the stupor induced by the serpent's basilisk eyes.

"Whurroo!" yelled Barney, the first to recover himself. "Av it ain't the two purfessors!"

"Vaneyke and Ferry!" gasped Frank; "but how on earth did they get here, and where did they come from?"

Certainly this was a matter which needed explanation. But this was speedily forthcoming.

A touch of the paddles sent the coracle to shore and the two men leaped out.

But the manner of each was excited and they cried:

"Frank, Barney, for your lives get away from this spot!"

"Vaneyke," gasped Frank, "what do you mean?"

"They are after us."

"Who?"

"The cave-dwellers. Where is the catamaran, Frank?"

"Right at hand."

"Good! Let us go to it at once and get out of here. Then I will explain all."

Frank was not loath to do this.

The cave-dwellers did not appear, but the party reached the catamaran.

Springing aboard, Barney pressed the lever and sent it aloft.

Then the two scientists sank into seats and

told their story to Frank, who listened wonderingly.

We left the two scientists in the phosphorescent cave, while the cave-dwellers were engaged in some sort of fantastic rite.

Neither Ferry nor Vaneyke had any doubt but that their fate was sealed, unless they could contrive to escape.

The sight of the coracles upon the sandy shore at once suggested a daring plan to Dr. Vaneyke.

They were now guarded by only three of their captors. They had not been bound, consequently had the free use of their limbs.

Both were old men, but plucky and determined. In a whisper Vaneyke gave the cue to Ferry.

Quick as a flash Vaneyke struck down the guard nearest to him. Ferry had felled his man.

The third guard broke and ran, while the two scientists dashed for the coracles. Into one of them they sprang.

Up with the paddles and away they went at full speed. In a jiffy they were one hundred yards away.

After them came a storm of missiles. By some of these they were hit and the boat was threatened with overturning.

But they managed to get safely out of range, and down the mad current of the river whither they knew not they went.

The cave-dwellers in coracles came in pursuit.

But the two scientists had gained a great start, and they never relaxed exertion until they came out of the cave as we have seen.

All this was rehearsed to Frank and Barney, who listened with deepest interest.

The account of the cave-dwellers seemed like a genuine Arabian Nights tale. That it was true, however, there was no dispute.

When the doctor and the professor learned that Pomp was missing they were solicitous indeed.

"He must be found!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "He is too good a man to lose. I don't believe that Pomp is dead!"

"No stone shall be left unturned!" cried Frank, grimly.

"Good!" cried Vaneyke. "Let us lose no time. But bear in mind one thing!"

"What?"

"The wonders of this region are not half told. It is all beyond human fancy!"

"I believe you!" agreed Frank; "but first let us establish Pomp's fate, then we will turn to other matters."

"Right—go ahead!"

Barney had allowed the catamaran to descend now in a different part of the forest. Just to the northwest was a range of hills.

Here a search was made of the undergrowth, and during the quest a thrilling discovery was made.

A path was found by Barney, and he followed it for some ways.

Suddenly it emerged into a wide clearing in the forest.

And in the center of this clearing there was revealed a wonderful spectacle.

A wide pool of clear water lay in a rock-fringed basin.

In the center of the basin were three huge spouting columns of water shaped like pyramids.

They rose to the height of full ten feet, and were beautiful in their symmetry and their evanescent colors.

Spellbound, the party gazed for a time upon this wonderful exhibition of nature's wonders. Nothing more beautiful had any of them ever seen.

The two scientists were particularly interested, and began at once to make an examination of the place.

"The water is a mineral!" declared Ferry, as he tasted it; "probably it has medicinal qualities. If this spring now was only in an accessible region we should add to our fortunes by opening it to the public!"

"Unfortunately it is not," said Dr. Vaneyke, "but as the Pyramid Springs it is certainly not the least of the wonders of this region."

"Right!" cried Frank, "and judging from the number of well-beaten paths leading down to it, I should say that the water is appreciated by wild beasts if not by men."

There was no disputing this fact.

The paths about the Pyramid Springs were well beaten, and showed that the place was frequently visited.

Indeed, even as they stood there, Barney gave an exclamation:

"Whisht, now! Pwhativer koind av animals do yez call thim, I'd loike to know?"

The party were astonished to see a perfect drove of peculiar-looking animals emerge from the undergrowth and advance to the water's edge.

They seemed utterly oblivious of the presence of the human beings near them. In appearance they were of the size of a young pig, but of the shape and color of a mouse minus its tail.

The explorers had seen many curious animals since coming into the wilds, but scarcely any more curious than these.

"Pwhat the devil are they?" asked Barney, curiously.

"I can tell you what they are," said Ferry, quickly, "and we will be lucky, indeed, if we do not have trouble with them before we get through."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise.

"They are an animal of the pig species, in many respects like the peccary, and known as the Australian wombat."

"I have heard of them!" cried Frank; "they are a dangerous animal to play with."

"You are right, Mr. Reade. As long as we don't come in their way, however, I hardly think that they will trouble us."

"We will take care to keep out of their path then."

"It is well!"

The wombats drank at the spring, appearing wholly oblivious of the presence of the white men.

Then grunting like a colony of pigs, they vanished once more into the depths of the forest.

Prof. Ferry drew a breath of relief.

"I am glad they are gone!" he said. "It would have been by no means pleasant to have been driven to a tree top and there held a prisoner for hours. I never would care to trouble the wombats!"

"Which is very good advice," said Frank. "Ah, what comes now?"

The undergrowth parted and out into the clearing there strode a magnificent specimen of the emu.

The bird, which is allied to the ostrich of Africa, is quite common in the wildest part of Australia. Its plumage is well known for its beauty.

One moment the emu stood in a half-frightened way gazing at the white men.

Then its graceful neck was arched, its throat expanded, and with a shrill cry of terror it vanished again into the forest.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank. "If I wanted to go on a hunting trip, I should do no more than to come here and sit down. All the game would come to me."

"Right!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"Shure an' I wud have taken a shot at that burred av yez hadn't 'ave skeered it away so quick!" cried Barney, disappointedly.

But Frank had turned, and was making a circuit of the clearing. Suddenly he paused with a sharp cry.

Directly in his path there was a flat slab of sandstone. And upon it there were characters engraved.

What was more, these characters were in English, and constituted quite a number of sentences, the purport of which was almost thrilling, and in fact afforded a tremendous revelation.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WALLED CITY.

THE amazement of Frank Reade, Jr., at his discovery cannot be expressed in words. For a moment he was dumfounded.

Then he managed to exclaim:

"Upon my word! What on earth is all this?"

Ferry and Vaneyke were by his side in a moment.

"Heiroglyphics!" cried the professor, excitedly. "Evidence of the existence of an ancient race in this locality."

But Frank retorted:

"Put on your glasses, professor. You can't see straight. Those are not heiroglyphics, but just as good English as you and I know!"

"English!" gasped the professor.

"Yes!"

"You don't mean it!"

"See for yourself. Here, I will turn the stone over, and we will see what it says!"

With Barney's help, Frank turned the stone over in such a way that they could the more readily read it.

What they read was to them a most astounding revelation.

Every letter was cut deep in the sandstone, and with precision. Thus it read :

"ANNO DOMINI, March 12, 18—.

"God grant this may some day meet the gaze of civilized beings, and the fate of those who rest beneath this stone may be published to the world.

"Here lie the bones of Captain David McLain, native of Shropshire, England, foully murdered by one of his own party, a fiend by nature, and whose name is Alfred Ward.

"At Melbourne Ward joined Captain McLain's exploring party in good faith, but from the first he has proved a disturbing spirit. The party when it left Melbourne consisted of :

"Captain David McLain,

"Harriet McLain, his daughter,

"Mrs. McLain, his wife,

"Vernon Beals, of Sussex, England,

"Alfred Ward, of Melbourne.

"And a body-guard of fifty faithful natives, all well versed in the art of bush life.

"We have penetrated far into the wilds of Northern Australia, have made many valuable discoveries, gained many points and are on our way home to Melbourne.

"Our trip might be voted a success, but for the insane conduct of Ward. In this neighborhood there is a race of strange people, who paint their skins with a red pigment, and who are known as Belots. They are well up in rude agin."

arts and have a walled city, which they can ably defend.

"Ward has fled to them and incited them against us, they having been friendly. The villain's motive is purely that of jealousy, he having fallen in love with Harriet McLain, and having been refused by her swore revenge.

"In the blackness of his heart Ward no doubt means to capture and kill us all but Harriet, whom it is his purpose to force into a marriage with him.

"To the young girl death is far preferable. The Belots, incited by Ward, even now surround us, and we are threatened with a hard battle for life. We are thirty strong, native guards and all. I can even now hear the Belots shouting. They are coming to the attack. Now for the struggle. God be with us.

"Inscribed by VERNON BEALS."

Every word of this thrilling account, engraved upon the slab of sandstone, was read by the explorers.

For a moment an impressive silence reigned. Then Prof. Ferry was the first to break the silence.

"That is a most graphic account," he declared. "I would give much to know if Captain McLain's party survived."

"So McLain is dead!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"Well, he was a brave man."

"We must be able to find some further evidence of the result about here," said Frank, with interest.

"Let us search the vicinity."

This was done.

But the only further evidence found was the skeleton of a native lying in the bush, and the fragments of a broken gun.

That there had been a battle in the vicinity seemed almost a dead certainty. But which side had won victory was not as yet fully established.

Finally it was decided to abandon the quest. Dr. Vaneyke suggested that a search be made for the walled city of the Belots.

"Do you know what my opinion is?" he asked Frank.

"No."

"I believe that the Belots captured the party, and that they may even now be held prisoners in their city."

Frank shivered as he said :

"My God! think of the fate of Harriet McLain."

"That is it," said Ferry. "It is our duty to look for them. In fact, it is one of the purposes of this expedition to learn the fate of McLain's party."

"Which we will certainly do," said Frank. "Let us go forward at once."

This would have been the certain move of the party but for an incident. Suddenly a loud shout went up.

All turned, in surprise and alarm.

But this was quickly changed to delight. Down an eminence there came flying a familiar form.

A yell which would have done credit to an Apache brave welled from Barney's throat.

"It's the naygur!" he cried.

It was, indeed, Pomp. The darky came tearing down the slope, delirious with joy at having met the party once more.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "Come to me arrums, yez imp av darkness. Shure, it's wil come yez are intoirely."

"Golly!" exploded Pomp, "but Ise done glad fo' to fin' yo' people once mo'. I done made up mah mind dat I wud neber see yo' agin."

"Shure an' we be as glad as yez!" cried Barney, who could not let his beloved partner go; "but phwere the devil have yez bin all this whoile?"

"Give him a chance for his breath, Barney!" laughed Frank, "and then he will very likely be able to tell us."

Pomp was allowed a breathing spell and then told his story.

His account of his ride on the monster turtle's back was most graphic and interesting.

But when he told of the walled city he had caught a glimpse of, then all were deeply interested.

"What was your impression of the city?" asked Frank, briefly.

"Golly, Marse Frank, it am a big place. I done fink de people what live dar am gwine to gib us a good tussle."

"What are the houses made of?"

"Dey am made ob stone, Marse Frank, an' dey is jes' about twelve feet high in de fus'story. It am quite a fine place, sah!"

"I am anxious to get a look at it," said Frank. "I think I will take a walk over that way."

"That is a good idea, Frank," said Ferry. "You can better judge what sort of a place it is by looking at it."

"I believe you are right!"

Accordingly the young explorer turned to Barney and said:

"Barney, you had better return at once to the catamaran. There is some danger of the Belots finding it, and it is hardly safe to leave it unguarded."

"All roight, sor," said Barney.

"Now, Pomp," continued Frank, "you may show us the way to the walled city."

This arrangement was at once carried out. Barney started upon the back trail of the catamaran.

Pomp led the way through the dense underbrush to the eminence near. From the top of this it was that he had obtained so good a view of the walled city.

In a few moments the party had reached the summit.

The view which was accorded them was a wonderfnl one.

What puzzled Frank the most was, however, how it happened that they had not before this described the walled city from the deck of the catamaran while sailing in the air.

But here it was certainly, and plainly revealed to them. Surely it was a beautiful city.

The yellow stone of which it was built contrasted beautifully with the green foliage of the forest about. For some time the party gazed upon the scene, spellbound.

Then Frank said :

"Truly, here is a discovery of which we may well boast. A new and strange people, of whom the world has known nothing heretofore. They seem possessed of a good knowledge of the arts and sciences. It is a pity that we shall find them hostile."

"Look yonder!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "Do you see that long building?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps that is where the prisoners are kept."

"Indeed!" said Frank. "It looks very much like a prison. Possibly within those walls are Mrs. McLain, Harriet and Beals, if they are alive."

With sensations hard to describe, the party gazed upon the peculiar long building, which seemed to be a prison.

CHAPTER XII.

A DISASTER.

THE idea that this might be the prison in which the survivors of Captain McLain's party were imprisoned seemed logical, and gave the watchers a queer thrill.

"What if they are in the place at this moment?" said Ferry.

"We must plan a rescue!" declared Frank Reade, Jr.

"How shall we work it?"

"There seems to be no other way but to attack the place and bring the Belots into a state of subjection."

"That may not be easy!"

"I do not see why! We have electric missiles which ought to destroy the whole place if we see fit. I will bring them to terms!" said Frank, confidently.

When the young inventor said a thing he meant it, as the others knew. So no demur was made.

It was proposed to at once return to the catamaran and move without delay to an attack upon the city.

So they started, Frank leading the way. They pushed on with all haste, until Pomp suddenly halted.

The negro stooped and placed his ear to the ground.

"What is the matter, Pomp?" asked Dr. Vaneyke, sharply.

"Hum! jes' you wait one moment," said the darky. "I done hear somefin. If I am not mistook, it am somefin like a earthquake. Fo' de good Lor'—"

The darky did not finish the sentence. There was a sudden indescribable shock, a peculiar movement of the ground, and an awful, thunderous bellow.

It was all over in a moment.

But the damage done was indescribable and beyond estimate. Great fissures were opened in the earth, rocks were split asunder, trees leveled, and for a moment it seemed as if the whole universe was going to pieces.

The party were all prostrated, and for a moment stunned.

There was no doubt but that it was an earthquake of the good old-fashioned kind. Everything was shook up generally.

Pomp was the first to scramble to his feet.

The darky was greatly excited.

"Golly, fo' glory!" he gasped. "What am all dat? Am yo' hurted, Marse Frank?"

"Not a bit," replied the young inventor, as he scrambled to his feet. "Upon my word, that was quite a shake, though, wasn't it?"

"I should say so!" gasped Vaneyke. "It was enough to throw over a mountain."

It required some moments for the party to recover themselves. But they finally did so, and once again they started for the catamaran.

But they had not gone far when yet another thrilling incident occurred.

Suddenly a man burst into view from a jungle ahead.

It required but a glance to at once recognize him. It was Barney.

The Celt's manner was extremely excited, and he came forward on the run, waving his arms wildly.

"What's up?" cried Frank, apprehensively. "Can anything have happened to the catamaran?"

In that instant it had flashed through his mind that the Belots might have gained possession of the air-ship.

But this idea was quickly dispelled. None

of them were to be seen. Barney came rushing up.

"Och hone, Misther Frank!" he cried.

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the young inventor, sharply.

"Shure, sor, there's the devil to pay. The catamaran, sor—"

"Well?"

Barney had been obliged to pause for breath.

"Shure, it's smashed all to smithereens, sor. A big mountain has fell over upon it and it's entoile ruined, sor."

Frank's heart sank.

It was a serious predicament. If harm had come to the catamaran they were in a hard fix truly.

He did not wait to catechise Barney further but went on at full speed. The others followed.

A few moments later the catamaran came into view. The scene was truly a most appalling one.

The air-ship had been left in a position just under a tall pillar of rock. No doubt the shock of the earthquake had caused this to topple over.

Tons of rock lay across the bow of the catamaran. It was as helplessly wedged in as if a part of the rock itself.

Barney had been on board at the time and the crash had given him a fearful shock.

The Celt had fancied that his last hour had come, and ran shrieking from the air-ship. His hasty examination had caused him to believe that the catamaran was hopelessly crushed.

That this was not the case, however, Frank now quickly determined by a brief examination. It was seen that the catamaran was simply wedged in, but not crushed.

That it could be extricated was possible, but only by blowing the rocks to pieces or otherwise removing them.

To do this would also mean possible harm to the catamaran. Altogether, it was a tough problem.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not the one to be easily baffled.

He would have at once begun work upon the enterprise had it not been for a new and unexpected incident.

Suddenly Barney threw up his arms and pitched forward on his face. Upon the ground beside him lay a boomerang.

The Celt was quickly upon his feet, however, for the blow had not injured him badly, simply giving him a bruise upon the shoulder.

"Thunder an' guns!" he roared. "Where the devil did that ever come from? Shure I'm nigh kilt."

But the question was easily answered. Not fifty yards distant upon a knoll there had suddenly appeared a group of the strange-looking Belots.

Nearly naked they were and armed with shields, boomerangs and lances. Their skins were a bright vermillion in hue, the result of the pigment which it was their strange custom to use.

One of them had thrown the boomerang, probably to arouse the party. It certainly was successful.

In an instant all cocked their rifles, and Pomp cried:

"Glory fo' goodness! I jes' gib dem heathens a shot fo' luck!"

But Frank interfered.

"No!" he cried, sharply. "Do nothing of that kind. It may be that they will be friendly

"A'right, Marse Frank!" replied the darky. "I do jes' as yo' say!"

The Belots stood for a moment inactive upon the hill. Then with sudden impulse they charged down it, yelling and brandishing their weapons furiously.

Frank knew that it was useless to procrastinate further.

The time for action had come and his voice went up in clarion notes:

"Stand firm! Give them a volley, boys! Shoot every one of them!"

The crash of the firearms smote upon the air. But it was evident that the Belots were accustomed to this.

For on they came, faster and more determined. Straight on, though their numbers were dropping.

Their numbers seemed legion. More swarmed over the ridge.

Ordinarily Frank would have let the catamaran up into the air. But this it was impossible to do now.

There was no way but to make a stand and fight it out. The devoted little band retreated to the cabin of the catamaran.

Here they kept up a fire through the windows and the numbers of their foes melted. But yet they came on.

Frank went forward on to the electric gun. He forced a projectile in the breech and turned the muzzle upon the Belots.

"I dislike to take so many lives," he said, grimly, "but it is all for self-preservation."

Then he drew back and pressed the electric button. There was a flash and a zigzag lightning flame.

Then there was a crash and the air was full of debris of flying forms. A mound of earth was raised, and before such fearful fire the Belots retreated in the wildest confusion.

"It is a plucky army that will face the electric gun!" said Frank, with a grim smile. "It is sure to conquer."

Terror most profound seemed to have seized the Belots. They retreated in the wildest of confusion.

The party on board the catamaran were congratulating themselves, when Frank Reade, Jr., cried:

"Come, Barney and Pomp. I want your assistance."

"Yis, sor," replied Barney.

"A' right, sah," returned Pomp. "Wha' am yo' gwine to do, Marse Frank?"

The young inventor gazed keenly at the two scientists for a moment, and then said:

"I am going to take the electric gun up onto yonder hill, and I will blow the Belots' city all to powder in twelve hours!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PLANS FOR A RESCUE.

THE declaration of Frank Reade, Jr., was a most startling one. There was seemingly no doubt but that he was able to execute his threat.

The idea of removing the electric gun from the deck of the catamaran to the hill was a good one. All clapped their hands.

"Good enough!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "You have hit it right, Frank. We ought to very soon be able to bring the rascals to terms!"

"We will do it," said Frank, determinedly; "have no fear of that."

The electric gun was not heavy, being pneumatic and made of thin, but finest and toughest steel. It was not difficult for four men to carry it.

Frank put Barney and Pomp at work un-

coupling the rigging which held it to the deck of the catamaran.

This was a slow task, and the day was drawing to a close. The shadows of night were falling fast, and Frank finally decided that it would on the whole be better to wait until morning before taking the gun up onto the hill.

He knew that it would be easier to work by daylight. Moreover, if attacked again by the Belots, a better defense could be made from the air-ship's deck.

But the strange people had withdrawn, and did not seem disposed to return to the attack.

It was not impossible, however, but that they were lying low for some new and daring move. It was well to be on guard.

Darkness shut down rapidly now.

Barney and Pomp were on guard and Frank Reade, Jr., and the two scientists were in the cabin making plans of action.

"As matters are now," said Frank, with conviction, "I don't see how we can bring the foe to terms in any other way than with the electric gun. It will take days of hard work to release the catamaran, and even then her machinery may need repairing. We must strike quickly and boldly for the sake of the prisoners in the power of the Belots!"

"I believe it," agreed Dr. Vaneyke.

"Yet," said Ferry, in an analytical manner, "we do not yet know that the lost explorers are held prisoners in the Belots' city."

"There is no doubt of it," said Dr. Vaneyke with asperity.

"I do not agree with you," said Prof. Philosphus. "Every one of them may have been put to death."

"I might believe that Beals had been executed, but the women are held prisoners, I will wager."

"At least," said Frank, breaking up the discussion, "it will be our duty to act upon the principle that all are yet prisoners among the Belots. That we can do."

"I agree to that," said Ferry. "Well, Frank, I can hardly wait until morning. Why can we not make some sort of a strike to-night?"

The young inventor turned in his chair and a light broke across his face.

"A good suggestion, professor!" he cried. "I am with you. What shall it be?"

This staggered the professor.

"Well—I—that is—" he stammered. "I hardly know what to say. I am afraid I shall have to leave that to you, Mr. Reade."

Frank laughed quietly and was thoughtful a moment; then he said, with sudden inspiration:

"I have an idea, and I believe it a capital one, although it involves no slight degree of risk."

All were interested.

"What is it?"

Frank drew a pencil from his pocket and upon a piece of paper he drew a diagram. The others looked at it wonderingly.

"It is not such a very great ways to the walled city!" he declared. "Now if one of us cared to take the risk under cover of this dark night he might pay a visit to the place and perhaps gain some valuable information."

"Ah, but would that be safe?" cried Dr. Vaneyke, doubtfully. "Not being familiar with the region it looks to me as if the risk would be very great!"

"No doubt it would," agreed Frank: "but if successful the result would be of incalculable value."

All exchanged glances, and Barney suddenly said:

"Mister Frank, shure I'll volunteer fer to thry that game!"

"Golly, Marse Frank, lemme go!" cried Pomp.

The young inventor arose.

"No!" he said, decidedly. "Neither of you shall go. I intend to undertake the thing myself."

This declaration created a sensation. But all attempts to dissuade the daring young inventor were in vain.

"I know my business," he declared. "I shall not fail."

At once he began to detail his plans.

"I shall carry this very fine spool of wire," he said. "I shall have a ticker with me, and at intervals I will telegraph you. One end of this wire is to be connected with an instrument in the cabin, and the other end I shall carry, unwinding the spool as I go."

"A very good idea," said Prof. Ferry; "but who is going with you?"

"I am going alone!"

All demurred at this. Barney and Pomp both pleaded to go, but Frank said:

"It would only add to the risk. I can work better alone. More than this, you will be able to know all that I am doing, for I shall keep you well informed."

So the matter was settled.

A short while later, equipped and dressed as lightly as possible, Frank left the catamaran.

Barney and Pomp demurred vigorously at the move, but Frank silenced them with authority, saying:

"You can best serve me by remaining right here. This will please me more than anything else you can do."

Dr. Vaneyke was to manipulate the telegraph key in the cabin. Barney and Pomp were to hold themselves in readiness to answer any call which Frank might make for help.

A few moments later Frank slid over the rail and disappeared in the darkness. Barney and Pomp stood by the rail for a long time listening intently.

"Huh! I kain't jes' say dat I likes Marse Frank's plan nohow!" said Pomp, in a disgusted way. "Somefin' is dead suah fo' to jes' happen to him."

"Bejabers, av he had taken yez along he never would have stood any chance at all, at all," said Barney, caustically.

"Wha' dat yo' say, Iish?"

"Yez heard it plain enough, naygur."

"Wha' fo' would anyfing mo' happen to Marse Frank if he tooken me long wif him?"

Pomp's eyes stood out like agates and he glared at Barney savagely. The Celt could not resist the opportunity for a dig at his friend.

"Begorra, it's black enuff now widout yez along to make it blacker. Shure, ye'd intinsify the darkness so that he couldn't see his nose afore him!"

Any reflection upon his color angered Pomp greatly. He shook his head and retorted:

"Don' yo' sass me like o' dat, yo' stuff Iish-man. Don' yo' see why he didn't take yo' 'long? Well, I jes' tell yo' why. De darkness out dar ain't deep enuff fo' to hide yo' Iish green and de enemy would be dead suah fo' to see yo' afo' yo' got anywhar near dem. Dat's a fac'!"

"Whurrool!" cried Barney. "Shure, green is a more elegant color than black. There's many a good man wears the green."

"Dar am lots ob Micks wears it."

If there was one thing in the world that

would fire Barney, it was to be called a Mick. His blood boiled.

"Be me sowl, do yez mean to insult me, naygur?" he roared.

"Devil a bit do I care how yez take it, naygur," he continued, "but yez are known to be the thrue descendant from an African monkey, an' yez kin niver be a white mon, even if ye was peeled av yez skin."

"Golly! but it am a suttin fac' dat yo' am jes' as bad off as me!" retorted Pomp. "Any one cud see by yo' face dat yo' am a genuine descendant ob de gorilla. Dat am de same kind ob sass fo' yo'."

This was too much for Barney.

It was true that there was a very striking resemblance between his broad mug and that of the African gorilla. But the Celt did not relish being told of it.

He made a biff at Pomp, but the darky dodged.

"I'll have the skin av yez fer that, naygur!" he cried.

"Don' yo' be too suah," retorted Pomp.

Then he lowered his head and struck Barney in the stomach. If the Celt had come in contact with a battering ram he could not have had a worse shaking up.

He went down in a heap, but Pomp, miscalculating, went over him and sprawled upon the deck, upsetting a pail of lye soap.

In this he was completely deluged. It was hard to say which had got the worst of the encounter, himself or his adversary. Both were badly demoralized for a moment.

But at that moment from the cabin there came the click of the telegraph.

"A message from Frank!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, rushing to the sounder.

Barney and Pomp, forgetting their mutual grievances, scrambled to their feet and rushed into the cabin to hear the message.

Dr. Vaneyke, who was manipulating the key, suddenly cried:

"Frank is in danger!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A TRIP IN THE DARK.

LEAVING the catamaran, Frank set out through the darkness, not without some misgivings as to the result of his hazardous undertaking.

He knew that there was a great deal of peril in the attempt, and, indeed, that it might result after all in no benefit gained.

But the young inventor was an adept in the art of woodcraft.

He had spent a season in the wild West in company with skilled trappers, and could follow the trail with the astuteness and skill of an Indian.

On through the darkness he went.

He kept paying out the wire, and once, placing the sounder upon it, sent word back to the catamaran.

"I am in sight of the city. How are things with you?"

The answer came back promptly:

"We are all right. Use due caution. Let us know if you want help or are in danger."

Frank smiled and continued on his way. Soon he had approached quite near to the high walls of the city. But thus far he had seen nothing of the Belots.

If any of them were on guard it was certainly not outside the walls.

And indeed Frank could see nothing of anybody on the wall. It seemed certainly as if the coast was clear.

But even in that moment of fancied security he became aware of a queer sensation.

Through the gloom just to the left he saw a shadowy form creeping upon him. It was evident that it was one of the Belots, and that his purpose was to leap upon him by surprise.

Frank pulled himself together for a struggle.

First he sent the message over the wire as follows :

"Am attacked. Do not come until further orders."

Then he dropped the spool and wire and drew his knife. He could have shot the fellow with the greatest of ease, but he was loath to do this.

He knew that the report would be apt to arouse the whole city, and would spoil all work for the night.

The only logical way was to meet the foe in his own manner, and vanquish him in a silent hand-to-hand struggle.

So Frank held his knife in readiness and awaited the attack. But he was subtle enough not to betray the fact to his foe that he anticipated the attack.

He pretended to be studying some point in an opposite direction. Nearer crept the murderous foe, until Frank could almost feel his presence.

Then the Belot native made a savage spring forward.

Had Frank been unprepared that moment might have been his last. But as it was, he was anticipating the attack, and stood ready for it.

Quick as a flash he wheeled.

The Belot's club was in mid-air. It hovered there a moment and descended upon air. Frank had cleverly dodged it and rushed in upon his assailant.

Up went the knife and down it came. To the hilt it was buried in the savage's breast.

The Belot gave a sharp, agonized cry and reeled backward. Frank, with a quick exertion, flung the body from him.

Victory was his. For a moment he panted with the exertion of the struggle. Then he picked up the sounder and sent the message back to the catamaran :

"You need not come. I have vanquished my man!"

Once more Frank crept forward. Now he was at the base of the city wall. Here he hesitated a moment.

Beyond the wall he could hear sounds which indicated the hum of busy life. Against the sky was reflected the glare of many lights.

The risk was something appalling. But this did not deter Frank.

He deposited the wire and telegraph sounder at the foot of the wall. Then he began to scale the wall.

This was not a difficult job.

There were interstices in which he could place his feet, and in this manner he had very quickly passed over the highest part of it.

Soon he reached the top of the wall, and there he crouched gazing down upon a scene the like of which he had never seen before.

The city lay before him.

Lights were flashing everywhere, and he saw long streets and wide squares, which were thronged with natives in their primitive style of dress.

There were bazaars and shops, almost the same as in Cairo or any Eastern city. But, of course, all was rude and primitive.

Carnivals were being held right in the open air. Great crowds of people were gathered here, and there was singing and dancing. All was life and light.

But the streets were narrow and dingy, the dwellings but mere patches of stone and mortar, without any given style of architecture.

The people were half naked, savage, uncouth and ugly. Yet it was all a wonderful scene in its way.

Frank gazed upon it with interest. Indeed so engrossed was he that he was not aware of a deadly danger at his very elbow.

A voice suddenly reached him with hissing force:

"Who the devil are you? Get up onto your feet!"

Never in his life did Frank obey an injunction quicker. He was upon his feet in a flash.

A tall dark form stood before him. It was a man of powerful stature, and it required no scrutiny to show that he was not of the Belot tribe.

Indeed his dress was that of the European, and he had spoken in English.

"Eh—what?" gasped Frank. "Who are you?"

"Please to answer me first!" said the stranger, ironically.

"Well, I am Frank Reade, Jr."

"Where are you from?"

"Readestown, U.S.A."

"An American, eh?" sneered the fellow.

"Well, what are you doing here?"

"That is my business!" retorted Frank, coolly.

"It is, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is my business, too!"

"In what respect?"

"I am one of the rulers of this country. My word is law here, and your life is in my hands."

The fellow folded his arms and faced Frank in this coarse manner. For a moment there was silence.

The young inventor felt no fear. He was as cool and calm as could be wished. After a moment he said :

"Well, now, perhaps you will deign to answer my question. Who are you?"

"Well, I am Alfred Ward. I know well enough what you are here for. You have been commissioned by the British Government to look for the lost exploring party of Captain McLain."

"Very good, sir," replied Frank. "You have guessed the truth."

"Well and good. I hope we understand each other perfectly well? Captain McLain is dead. The others are prisoners here. Harriet McLain is very shortly to be my wife. You expect to rescue her. You are a very clever fellow, sir, with your wonderful air-ship, but you will never succeed."

Ward laughed harshly and loudly. Frank experienced a feeling something akin to being in the presence of an evil spirit.

"I have met with villains in my life," he said, keenly, "but never a deeper one than you!"

"Spare your personalities, sir. Be kind enough to hold up your hands."

"You ask me to surrender?"

"Yes."

"But what if I refuse?"

"Then you shall die!"

"We are alone here. I am as good a man as you!" said Frank, warily. "I refuse to surrender!"

"You are a fool! With a gesture I can bring a hundred men to my aid. Up with your hands! Yield!"

"Never!"

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

With a curse the fellow rushed forward. But Frank was ready for him. They closed, and for a moment it seemed as if Frank had the upper hand.

Right on the edge of the wall they were struggling. The least swaying would precipitate them down many feet to the jagged rocks below.

Frank was lithe and wiry, and a scientific wrestler.

But his foe was powerful, and far too heavy for him. It required but a few moments of struggling to convince the young inventor of this. But luck favored him for a moment. He forced the villain back. Ward's foot caught, and he slipped and went down.

But in that moment a shrill whistle pealed from his lips. It broke the night air with startling distinctness.

In an instant the vicinity swarmed with natives.

CHAPTER XV.

FRANK'S ADVENTURES.

FRANK saw at a glance the awful peril which now threatened. His life hung in the balance and all depended upon prompt and wise action.

He knew that it would be folly to attempt to stand his ground.

He could have killed Ward then and there, but yet his heart shrank from this. He was averse to taking human life.

There was but one thing for him to do safely, and that was to retreat.

With a quick movement he flung the villain aside. The wall was narrow and only by clutching at the edge did Ward escape going over.

The Belots came swarming over the wall in a legion.

They were close upon Frank. He knew that he could not escape by climbing down the wall.

There was no resort but to retreat along the wall.

This he did at full speed. The Belots followed full bent. Along the wall they went.

But as they went on the wall grew higher, and there seemed less chance of safe descent.

Now Frank came to a point where the wall seemed to cross a ravine. The young inventor saw far below the turbid waters of a river.

It seemed as if the whole town was aroused. As he looked behind him he could see nothing but the forms of his enemies. He knew that to be overtaken would be death.

One swift thought flashed through Frank's mind.

He embraced what he believed was his only chance. One moment his form wavered, swayed, and then over the edge he went.

It was a leap for life.

Down into the darkness he went and out of sight. The savages, reckless fellows, halted. None of them dared to follow him in that manner.

Down into the dark water Frank plunged. There were many chances against him in that moment.

If he had struck a rock under the surface or alighted in shallow water, death would have been his certain portion.

He knew this and shrank from the awful peril. But fortune had favored him. He went down into deep water, came to the surface and struck out.

But the danger was not over yet.

The Belots did not dare to follow him, but down into the water came missiles of every description.

Fortunately not one of these struck him. They fell all about him.

Frank struck out and swam for the shore. Soon he was able to pull himself out upon terra firma.

He was not much the worse for his experience, but he took care to get quickly to cover. It had been a narrow escape.

But Frank would not concede that his trip had been altogether a failure. He had learned much.

He knew now that the survivors of the McLain expedition were all alive.

He was also aware that as yet no harm had been done the women. This was gratifying knowledge certainly.

Hope sprang up in his breast that he would yet be able to accomplish the rescue of all.

But it was important now to return the quickest way to the catamaran.

Concerted action should be made at once.

Frank saw that there was but one way to bring the Belots to terms.

This he believed he could do with the electric gun.

Therefore, he must return post-haste to the catamaran.

But this did not promise to be a very easyfeat.

Back of him was a high mountain wall. To scale this was not going to be so very easy.

Time would be lost in the attempt. Yet to go ahead was to face the foe who were scrambling down into the ravine.

What was to be done?

It was necessary to make some bold move at escape, and at once.

Frank glanced down the river.

He saw a huge log just floating out into the rapids. Without a moment's hesitation he struck for it.

He reached it, and the next moment, clinging to the log, he went down into the blackness of the lower river.

On and on he was whirled in the darkness. Then after a time he came to a stop in a still pool of water.

Striking out he swam to the shore once more. This time he was beyond the sight and hearing of his enemies.

But it was not as yet clear how he was to get back to the catamaran. He did not possess sufficient knowledge of the country to enable him to make a circuit of the hill.

Before him was a deep jungle. He crept into the edge of this and watched and waited for a while.

There was no sign or sound of the Belots.

He firmly believed that they had given over the pursuit. He had half made up his mind to risk retracing his steps when a thrilling thing occurred.

Suddenly there was a rustling sound in the foliage in the rear. Instinctively he turned.

He was given a chill. Deep in the darkness was a pair of fiery eyes. They seemed to waver and dance like *ignis fatuus*.

For a moment the young inventor imagined that they were the orbs of a panther.

But he was quickly undeceived. That moment of waiting was to him a fatality.

Suddenly there was a swishing, whirring sound. He made a leap forward to escape, but too late.

Powerful, sinuous folds encircled him. A cold, slimy body enveloped him.

"Oh, God!" he screamed, in horror. "It is a snake!"

A giant boa it was which had him in its folds.

He knew well what a terrible fate threatened him. The most powerful of reptiles had the faculty of crushing him into a jelly.

But Frank's pluck and coolness and presence of mind all came back to him now.

One of his arms chanced to be free, and he had managed to get a grip on the handle of his hunting knife.

The snake's folds were drawing tighter, the hideous head swayed and danced above him.

The young inventor drew the keen blade across the snake's body. Great jets of blood leaped up and suffused his person.

In the darkness Frank could only be guided by the sense of touch.

But he knew that the only way to get rid of those horrid folds was to cut them in two. By this disintegration alone he could hope to escape their power.

Accordingly he slashed away furiously. He was none too soon. Had he not adopted this method as he did, his death would have been a certainty.

As it was, he freed the serpent's coils from his body. Completely severed, they fell in squirming masses.

Drenched with blood, weak and faint, Frank staggered down to the river side. He sank down and drank of the cooling water.

Then he plunged into the current and allowed it to cleanse his person of the snake's blood.

He recovered quickly however in the cool night breeze.

Regaining the shore, he was resolved to waste no further time in the vicinity. His one desire was to get back to the catamaran.

What had been going on there he had no means of knowing. Up the river's banks he went.

He had drifted further down the river than he had imagined. It was fully an hour before he came in sight of the walled city again.

Then he proceeded more cautiously. However, he saw no signs of the Belots.

Once he fancied he heard distant shouting. He crept on cautiously. Soon he reached the spot where he had taken the plunge from the city wall.

None of the foe were in sight. Cautiously up the ravine he crept, and still the coast was clear.

Suddenly, as he crept on, he heard a clicking sound in the grass. He rushed forward to the very foot of the city wall.

And here, where he had left it, he found the telegraph wire and sounder.

He picked up the sounder, and quickly sounded a call. He knew that it had just been calling him.

The reply came quickly.

"Is that you, Frank?"

"Yes," the young inventor replied. "Did you call me just now?"

"We did. Come back just as quickly as you can. We are attacked by the Belots, who completely surround us, and evidently mean business."

Frank waited to hear no more.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RIVAL TRIBES.

FRANK did not even wait to pick up the wire. He left it and all behind in his hot haste.

He knew that if the catamaran was attacked, it was necessary for him to be on hand at once. Failure to do this meant ruin, defeat and death.

He had perfect faith in Barney and Pomp, but even the assistance of one more was vital. On he sped through the night.

And now he heard the distant crack of fire-arms.

There was no doubt but that the battle was on.

With such overpowering numbers the Belots might carry the day.

This was all the work of Ward, as Frank knew.

Under his directions the natives would know just how to attack the catamaran.

But Frank was determined to sell his life rather than allow the air-ship to fall into the clutches of the Belots.

All depended upon saving the catamaran.

For should it fall into their clutches, no doubt they would not hesitate to at once destroy it.

With the loss of the catamaran it would be quite a serious matter for our adventurers to get out of the country alive.

So Frank ran on.

The sounds of the conflict grew louder every moment.

"Why don't they use the gun?" muttered the young inventor, in an agony of dread. "That would win the victory quicker than anything else!"

This seemed a certain fact. But Frank had not long to worry over this matter.

Suddenly he heard a distant, thunderous roar. Three times this was repeated. Then all sounds of the conflict died out.

"That has settled the question," declared Frank; "they cannot fight against the electric gun!"

Indeed, the battle seemed suddenly to have ended. There was no reason to doubt but that the Belots had withdrawn.

Frank was not a little surprised that they should give up the battle so quickly.

But he reflected that it was very likely their deadly fear of the mysterious gun which had caused them to do this.

That this was not the real reason, however, he was soon to learn.

Another singular fact was, that as Frank went on, he met none of the Belots. But it was likely that they had retreated in another direction.

Frank began to use more caution now, for fear of running across some of the foe. But he might have spared himself the trouble.

None were encountered. A few moments later he came out into the clearing and in sight of the catamaran.

It was now semi-daylight, and he saw Barney on the deck. Frank shouted loudly:

"Barney! Hullo!"

"Whurroo!" responded the Celt, "it's Miser Frank!"

Then down from the catamaran's deck he sprung, and came rushing down to meet Frank.

The Celt was overjoyed to welcome his master again.

"Shure, it's glad I am to see yez back safe again!" he cried.

In a few moments Frank was on board the catamaran.

He was joyfully welcomed, and then explanations were had all around. Frank told of his experiences.

"Then the prisoners are all alive yet!" cried Prof. Ferry. "You gained a great point, Mr. Reade, in learning that."

"I believe it!" cried Frank. "We shall yet succeed in saving them!"

"I hope so!"

"But I would like to ask a question."

"What is it?"

"How on earth did it happen that the foe

abandoned their attack on the catamaran so suddenly?"

"Bejabers! I gave them three shots with the electric gun!" declared Barney.

"Ah, but that should not have caused them to abandon it wholly."

"Well, it is something of a mystery," said Dr. Vaneyke. "I believe it is worth investigating. When daylight comes suppose we do so!"

"Daylight is here!" said Prof. Ferry. "In twenty minutes the sun will be up!"

So it was decided. Soon the orb of day was above the horizon.

As there seemed to be none of the foe in the vicinity. Frank and Barney ventured to leave the air-ship.

They were armed to the teeth, however, and proceeded with great caution.

They had soon reached the edge of the forest. Here they paused.

A distant strange medley of sounds had come to Frank's ears.

"Do you hear it, Barney?" he asked.

"Shure, sor, an' I do that!"

"What is it?"

"Be me sowl, sor, I believe it are some sort of a ruction goin' an over yonder beyond that hill!"

"So do I!" agreed Frank, "but yet I am at a loss to understand it!"

However, Frank was not to be baffled, so he began to climb the hill. The nearer to the summit they drew the plainer became the strange sounds.

There was shouting and the clash of weapons. It certainly sounded like a distant concourse of armed men.

Now Frank and Barney drew near to the top of the hill.

As they at length reached it, a vast track of country was spread to view. Below was a mighty level plain, extending almost from the northern wall of the Belots' city to a distant chain of mountains.

And upon this plain in martial array there were two vast bodies of men.

Their number ran up into the thousands. They seemed about equal in number and divided into squads were facing each other.

It was nothing more nor less than a mighty field of battle.

Upon one side were the Belots. Upon the other, the strange cavern race, the Shunokins. The latter had ventured out into open day in order to give battle to their foes.

And now it could be seen what a strange looking race they were. In the sunlight, their bodies so pallid from the air of the cavern looked pearl white.

The Belots upon the other hand made a more formidable array.

They were coarser, harder looking and seemed born to be warriors. The Shunokins were vice versa,

All were armed with nothing but primitive weapons, lances and clubs and boomerangs and darts.

Frank and Barney gazed upon the scene with keenest interest.

The battle had already begun, so it was out of the question to retire and leave the scene. Both were too much interested.

"They are equal in numbers but I think I can foretell the result," said Frank.

"Shure, sor, an' how is that?" asked Barney.

"The Belots will win."

"I believ yez are roight."

"Certainly, they would whip three times

that number of the Shunokins. There is no doubt of that."

"Well, sor," said Barney, "divil a bit av difference does it make to us, sor. They are both enemies to us."

"If they would only eat each other up it would be most gratifying to me," said Frank. "Shure it would save us a deal of trouble."

"You are right."

Both laughed and continued to watch the battle. It was a most thrilling as well as interesting scene.

There was no small degree of generalship shown in the displaying of the different divisions. It was plain that though savages, they were not unversed in the art of skillful warfare.

Suddenly the battle opened.

A squad of the Shunokins rushed upon a squad of the Belots. There was no chance for staggering volleys, for the conflict was purely hand to hand.

In an inextricable mass they became involved. It was nothing but give and take with war ax and club.

Men fell on both sides. Brains were battered out, breasts were pierced with darts, legs and arms were shattered and neither side seemed to gain the supremacy.

Yet unquestionably the weight of advantage seemed to be with the Belots. That they would win was almost certain.

Frank and Barney watched the conflict thus with varying emotions.

Suddenly a new and startling incident occurred. A sharp cry escaped the lips of Barney.

"Shure, Misster Frank, an' phwat wud yez call that?"

Both men stood in astonishment gazing at a spectacle before them. From the undergrowth a man nearly as naked as the day he was born had started forth.

He came rushing toward Frank and Barney with pleading gestures. To their amazement they saw that he was not a savage, but a white man and civilized.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE FIELD.

WORDS cannot express the utter amazement of Barney and Frank. Save for a breech clout the man was naked.

His skin was torn and bleeding, there were bruises and cuts upon his body, and in other ways he showed hard usage.

Yet his face, though pale and drawn with suffering, was handsome and intelligent.

He was a young man and splendidly formed. As he came up he cried out in good English:

"God be praised! Do I see my own countrymen again? Then I am indeed happy."

"Who are you?" cried Frank in amazement. What has happened to you?"

"My name is Vernon Beals!" replied the young man, and said no more.

For in a moment Frank had grabbed his hand excitedly:

"Heaven be praised! You are the man we are in quest of. You are one of Captain McLain's party!"

"I am!" replied Beals, excitedly.

"Then you are with friends!"

"Thank God! You have come hither to rescue us?"

"That is our purpose in this region," replied Frank.

"Such good news nigh turns my brain. Oh, if only Mrs. McLain and Harriet were here now! I think my cup of happiness would be complete."

Beals was almost hysterical in his great joy.

He danced and leaped in the air like a child in his glee.

"We intend to rescue the ladies if it is in our power," declared Frank. "What do you think of our chances, Mr. Beals?"

"They are good," replied the young Englishman. "Indeed, I believe they are. Yet these Belots are a bad class to handle. Moreover, they are directed by one of the greatest scoundrels on the face of the earth."

"And that is Ward."

"Yes. He was a traitor and a murderer!" declared Beals, forcibly.

"I know him and have had a little experience with him," said Frank.

"He killed brave Captain McLain," continued Beals, "and delivered us all up to the Belots. He was foolish enough to fall in love with Harriet, who hates him. It is his hope to get her in his power in this way."

"Certainly he is a villain. Your experience must have been a hard one."

"You can see that it has," declared Vernon. "Just look at me. I am naked, and in this fashion I have been obliged to work as a slave in the city of savages."

"That is hard!"

"There are no indignities or privations I have not suffered. Words cannot describe them I can assure you."

"Well, you have made your escape," said Frank, cheerily.

"For which I praise God. I live now only to revenge myself upon the traitor, Ward!"

"There is no doubt but that you will succeed. You shall return with me to the catamaran and I will furnish you with clothing."

"Is that the wonderful air-ship of which I have heard so much?"

"It is," replied Frank.

"I shall be glad to see it. It is indeed a wonderful thing that aerial navigation has at last been solved. When your air-ship appeared in the sky I was laboring as a slave in the Belot city. It took Ward a long time to explain its character to the Belots and overcome their superstitious fears."

"Then you knew that we were coming to your rescue?" asked Frank.

"No, not that exactly. I knew that a talented American inventor with his wonderful air-ship was in the region."

"Ah, well, let us return to the catamaran."

"But wait," said Beals. "You are interested in this battle I know. A great deal depends upon the result."

"I would like to see it," said Frank. "Yet I am anxious to serve you."

"After the battle. I can wait."

"As you say."

Then the young inventor turned to Barney.

"I have no doubt Ferry and the others would like to see it. Suppose you jog back to the catamaran and tell them I think it will be safe for them to come."

"All roight, Misster Frank," replied Barney, and away he went.

Frank and Beals became engrossed in the battle, and somewhat oblivious of all else.

"It is my opinion that the Belots will defeat their antagonists," said Frank.

Beals nodded his head.

"There is little doubt of that," he declared; "they are stronger and better fighters."

"Certainly both are strange races."

"You are right."

Then Frank gazed toward the city.

"As I live!" he exclaimed. "I believe it would not be a bad time to make an attack upon the city."

But Beals shook his head.

"Not more than half of the Belots are in the field," he said. "And those in the city are on their guard and ready for business."

"Then you would not advise it?"

"It would be the worst possible time to make the attack in my opinion. The foe are all on their guard."

Frank could not help but see the logic of this. So he said no more, and all became engrossed in watching the conflict.

The right wings of the two armies were now hotly engaged in the battle. The left seemed held in reserve.

It seemed to be the purpose of the Shunokins to turn the left of the Belot line, but the effort made a fatal weakness in their center.

The wily Belots were quick to see this and act accordingly.

A wedge-like movement was made for the Shunokins' center. It proved successful in the extreme.

Like conflicting tides the two sections of the armies met. Down through the weakened center went the victorious Belots.

In less time than it takes to tell it the Shunokin army was divided. With their center turned, the right and left flank in confusion, both yielded.

This terminated the conflict.

In a jiffy the Shunokins were routed and flying for their lives from the plain. Frank had seen enough.

In the meanwhile Ferry and Dr. Vaneyke and Pomp had come up. All had viewed the battle with interest.

"Enough!" cried Frank; "let us get out of this the quickest way. Now to strike a blow for the rescue of Mrs. McLain and Harriet!"

"Hurrah!" cried Vernon Beals; "that is the kind of talk."

Back to the catamaran all went with all haste.

Beals was shown about the air-ship by Frank and was delighted with its wonderful appointments.

"But if I were you, Mr. Reade!" he said, pointedly, "I should want to at once take measures to release the catamaran from its present bad position."

"That will require a great deal of time!" said Frank, "and that is to me just now of more value than anything else!"

"But are you not afraid of an attack from the Belots? I should think they might overwhelm you in this position!"

"They have tried it twice and failed," said Frank, confidently. "No, I believe I can hold their whole nation at bay with my electric gun!"

Beals listened to all this with deep wonderment.

"I do not believe it will be necessary to move the catamaran at present in order to gain our ends," continued Frank.

"How else can you do that?"

"I shall move my electric gun to the summit of a high hill near by. From there I can completely demolish their city, if they do not come to terms!"

"Good!" cried Vernon, joyfully. "Your scheme is a good one and it will work grand. I have no doubt they will be glad to yield up the two prisoners in preference to being blown to pieces by the electric gun!"

"I think so!"

There was one member in the party, however, who differed with Frank.

This was Prof. Ferry.

"I tell you that we are taking chances in

leaving the catamaran here in this position," he declared. "At any unguarded moment a gang of the savages may descend upon and destroy it."

Frank was bound to admit that Ferry was partly right.

"However," he said, tersely, "we will carry out the plan as formulated. I think we shall be able to win."

So the matter rested.

But just as they were about to begin operations for the moving of the electric gun, there appeared in the clearing one of the Belot savages.

He carried a lance, upon the end of which was a long streamer.

"What does the fellow want?" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"It is a truce," declared Frank, confidently. "Well, we will talk with him."

The young inventor stepped out into view, and with reassuring gestures bade the fellow advance.

He did this, and when within a few yards of the catamaran, Frank saw that he had a slab of slate stone in his hand.

This he offered to the young inventor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BARNEY AND POMP IN TROUBLE.

FRANK took the slate in his hand and glanced at it.

He saw that there was writing upon it. It was a bold, legible hand in good English, and he read:

"TO FRANK READE JR.:

"SIR—It is folly for you to attempt to stand ground against us. We are a thousand to your one. I call upon you now to surrender. If you do not death shall be your lot. If you surrender peaceably your lives shall be spared. Excuse this primitive method of correspondence, but all my stock of writing paper is exhausted. Yours truly,

"ALFRED WARD, King of the Belots."

Frank read this through, and then smiled ironically.

He turned the slab over, and wrote upon the back of it a reply as follows:

"TO ALFRED WARD—So-called King of the Belots—

"SIR—Your insulting communication is received. I have only to say in reply that your proposition is too preposterous to think of. In turn I call upon you to surrender those ladies whom you villainously hold captive, or I shall blow you and your tribe from the face of the earth. I will give you one hour to answer this proposition. Yours,

"FRANK READE, JR."

Frank handed the slab to the Belot messenger. The fellow turned and made off at full speed.

The young inventor turned to his inquiring comrades.

"That fellow Ward is a presumptuous chap," he cried. "He is foolish enough to demand our surrender."

Dr. Vaneyke and Barney laughed. But Vernon Beals looked serious.

"I trust you will pardon me, gentlemen," he said, "but I know something of the power of these people. We can hardly afford to hold it too lightly. They may give us much trouble yet."

"I appreciate that fact," said Frank, "and I quite agree with you. I don't propose to take any chances. Yet I have no idea of such a thing as a surrender."

"Never!" cried Dr. Vaneyke and Ferry, in one breath. "We will die, but we will never surrender!"

"It would, in fact, be equivalent to death to surrender," said Beals.

"Then we had better die with our boots on." "Bejabers, I'm ready fer that same!" cried Barney.

"Dis chile am jes' dar, too," agreed Pomp, with a grin.

The Belot messenger was now out of sight. Once more attention was given to the moving of the electric gun.

"We certainly have no time to lose," said Frank. "After receiving my sharp reply to his message, Ward will no doubt be disposed to act quickly."

But just as the party emerged once more upon the deck of the catamaran, there was a whirring sound, and a number of arrows rattled against the steel hull of the catamaran.

One of them pierced Barney's sleeve, and another shot away Prof. Ferry's hat.

Then followed a number of boomerangs. In a copse near it was evident that a number of the gang were in hiding.

This was a risk not to be lightly regarded.

"By Jupiter!" cried Frank, springing back to the cabin door. "They mean business, don't they?"

"You're right!" cried Vernon Beals. "I warn you to look out, for the points of those arrows are poisoned."

"Poisoned arrows!" gasped Dr. Vaneyke. "That is bad."

"If you were struck with one, you would think so," said Beals, quietly. "The victim is bound to die in awful agony."

This statement had the effect of causing all to adopt methods of caution.

"I'll fix them!" said Frank, with a grim smile.

The party had already discharged their rifles into the copse, but with little or no effect.

The young inventor went forward and placed a projectile into the pneumatic electric gun.

He pointed the muzzle toward the copse and pulled the trigger.

The effect was terrific.

There was a lightning-like burst of flame, a fearful explosion in the thicket, and the air was filled with flying debris and the bodies of a number of the Belots.

One shot was effectual. None of the foe were in sight after that.

They did not stay to dispute the pass but fled. The electric gun was a little too strong for them.

Vernon Beals gazed upon the spectacle in stupefaction.

"My soul!" he exclaimed. "I don't wonder that you feel confident, Mr. Reade. Why, those rascals will stand scant show before such a weapon as that."

"I thought you would see it!" cried Frank, triumphantly. "I tell you I can wipe them all out of existence if I choose."

"I am not disposed to doubt you. I would advise that no time be lost in assailing the town."

"That is a good suggestion," said Frank. "Come, boys, let us get the gun off the deck at once."

All hands responded to this call.

The electric gun was lifted with ease, carriage and all, from the deck of the catamaran.

The distance necessary to carry it was fully half a mile.

But it was not heavy, else the air-ship could not have carried it. In a short while it was carried to the very summit.

Here a fine view of the city could be had.

A thrilling scene was witnessed.

The whole place seemed alive with armed Belots. They were swarming out of the city

gates, and it was evident that they meant business.

Frank gazed upon the scene a moment with thrilling, tingling veins.

"They mean to annihilate us, don't they?" he muttered. "We will see about that!"

There was just one projectile with the gun. All the others were on board the air-ship.

Indeed it was necessary for Frank to make some more. He could do this quickly, but it would be necessary to return to the catamaran.

An idea struck him.

"I will give them checkmate just now!" he cried, "this one shot will confuse them until I can get some more shells loaded."

Accordingly he placed the projectile in the breech of the gun and then sighted it.

He pressed the electric key and the result was thrilling.

The projectile struck in the very midst of the savages. The result was that dozens of them were killed and wounded.

They were of course thrown into a panic for the time being, but Frank knew that the advantage ought to be followed up.

He turned to Barney and Pomp.

"Stay here with the gun," he said. "Will the rest of you please return to the catamaran with me and help bring up some more ammunition?"

"Of course we will," cried Vernon.

And away they all went back to the catamaran, leaving Barney and Pomp with the gun.

Reaching the air-ship, Frank at once began work upon the refilling of some explosive shells.

While he worked at this, the others busied themselves in putting out a guard wire about the catamaran which Frank intended to heavily charge for the purpose of warding off an attack.

They completed this job just as Frank finished loading the last shell.

The wire, or rather several of them, had been carried in a circle about the air-ship. A circuit was made and connected with the dynamos so that the pressing of a key would make it complete.

Frank emerged from the cabin with some of the projectiles in his arms.

"It will be necessary for some one to remain aboard the Catamaran," he said, "and it should be a man who is conversant with the uses of electricity."

"Then it had better be me," said Dr. Vaneyke, readily. "I will stay."

"Very good," said Frank.

So it was arranged that Dr. Vaneyke should remain aboard the air-ship. The others were about to load themselves with the projectiles when an astounding shock was accorded all.

The top of the hill was suddenly seen to be swarming with Belots.

In their midst were Barney and Pomp. It was certain that they were prisoners, that a surprise had been sprung, and that the electric gun was in the hands of the foe.

A more appalling realization for the adventurers the human mind could hardly picture.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN SLAVERY.

BARNEY and Pomp left with the electric gun upon the brow of the hill were not in the most comfortable frame of mind imaginable.

From their position they could see the actions of the Belots plainly.

There was great danger that the foe might succeed in climbing the hill before Frank could return with the dynamite bombs.

If they should do this, then the chances of the two defenders would be slim.

They watched apprehensively and waited impatiently for Frank to come. Yet he did not appear.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, lugubriously. "Kain't say dat I jes' likes de looks ob dis fing nohow. What am we gwine to do if dem barbarians tackles us, lish!"

"Bejabers, give them a hot reception!" replied the Celt.

"Huh! dat amn't so easy fo' to do yo' kin bet!"

"If Misther Frank iver gits here wid dem bombs it will be all right, naygur."

"He'll neber do dat, sah, hear mah gentle voice!" declared Pomp, positively. "Dar am no doubt ob dat."

"Well, begorra, we have got ter obey ordhers, anyway, naygur."

"Oh, I jes' reckon dat we hab, chile. I kain't fin' no fault wif dat—not a bit."

Both turned to see Frank and his companions appear on the catamaran deck. At once their hopes arose.

"Bejabers, they're comin'!" cried Barney. "Shure, we'll give the enemy a taste av fun now."

"Golly, dat we will, sah!" cried Pomp, with a grin.

But the words had barely left their lips when an unlooked-for and depressing thing occurred.

Suddenly from the copse in their rear there sprang forth half a hundred of the Belots.

It was a cleverly-worked surprise.

They had climbed the hill in the rear of the two servitors, and so silently that they were taken completely off their guard.

The Belots were upon them like an avalanche. Barney tried to use his rifle, but it was stricken from his grasp.

He was seized by powerful arms. He struggled bravely, but weight of numbers told.

In a jiffy he was a prisoner, and Pomp also. The two faithful servitors of Frank Reade, Jr., were chagrined as well as horrified at their fate.

They saw the party on the catamaran rushing to their rescue, but the swarm of Belots on the hill were too numerous.

"Bejabers, we are in fer it, naygur!" cried Barney, lugubriously.

"Bress yo' haht, it done look dat way!" agreed the darky. "I wondah why de' don' kill us right to onct!"

But it did not seem to be the purpose of the Belots to kill their prisoners. Instead, they were hustled away toward the walled city.

Through vast bodies of the savages the two prisoners were led.

Not until they were fairly within the walls of the Belot city did they fully realize their position.

They were captives in the power of the Belots.

What would be the end of it?

Both remembered that Beals had been kept as a slave. Undoubtedly this was the fate intended for them.

Into the densest part of the city they were led. Here they were thrown into a small, square chamber in one of the low-roofed buildings and an armed guard stood at the door.

What was going on outside they had little means of knowing.

Their sensations can better be imagined than described. The hours seemed years to them.

"Be jabers!" said Barney, sententiously. "I kain't say that I loike this at all, at all. I wud rayther be taken out an' hung!"

"Dat am jes' de way I feel, chile," declared Pomp. "Ise drefful anxious to know what dey am gwine to do wif us!"

"So am I, bedad!"

But the Belots did not seem disposed to be accommodating enough to relieve the suspense of their prisoners.

The night hours wore away slowly. Neither of them slept.

Finally daylight came. Then there were footsteps at the door and a man entered.

He stood upon the threshold with a leering, triumphant smile. It was no other than Alfred Ward.

Barney glared at the villain.

"Well, phwat are yez luckin' at, yez misfit monkey?" he demanded, angrily; "didn't yez iver see a man before?"

Ward laughed defiantly.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," he said, harshly. "You must remember that you are at my mercy."

"Divil a bit do we care for that," retorted Barney. "If yez are going to kill us why don't yez do it without so much fuss about it?"

"Kill ye!" gritted the villain.

"Didn't I say that same?"

"We haven't any idea of killing ye. But we are going to do what is no doubt worse to you. We are going to put you to work!"

"Worruk is it?" cried Barney. "Divil a bit will I worruk for such as ye. I'll sthrike afore I commence!"

"No you won't!" gritted the villain. "Slaves never strike!"

"So it's slaves yez mean to make av us?"

"Yes."

"That's foine."

"Oh, you like the idea do you? You may not like it so well after it has been tried on you."

"Dis chile neber be no slave!" cried Pomp, obdurately. "Mah fader was a slave, but I done fink I se got mah freedom!"

Ward laughed boisterously.

"You fellows amuse me," he said, "but I have no more time to fool with you. Strip off your clothes!"

Barney and Pomp looked amazed.

"Phwat's that, sor?"

"Strip off your clothes!"

"Phwat for, I'd loike to know?"

"Slaves are not allowed clothing. Beside, this is a tropical climate."

"Well, I jes' needs mine, and I clar to goodness I ain' gwine to take dem off," said Pomp.

"You ain't, eh?"

Ward glared at Pomp. Then he turned and said something in a guttural voice.

Into the room sprung a couple of stalwart Belots.

At Ward's instigation they seized the prisoners and began to pull off their clothing. Resistance was useless.

In a couple of minutes every vestige of clothing was stripped from them. Their anger was intense but futile.

They were allowed to retain a breech-clout, made of a coarse kind of cloth used by the Belots.

"Drive them out into the field and to work!" directed Ward, in the Belot tongue.

Barney and Pomp were led out into the street. Other slaves were there, though they were all natives like the Belots themselves.

In the common gang, the two servitors were driven away with the lash cracking at their heels.

It was certainly not a pleasant situation or

outlook. Through the streets of the city in the midst of the slave gang they were driven.

Ward had disappeared and they were under the lash of a brutal savage who was a genuine type of a murderer.

After a time they came to a wide field where several hundred of the slaves were working at various occupations.

Some were cutting stone, others were making bows and arrows, and a number were engaged in the construction of a building near.

Barney and Pomp were put at work upon this, carrying heavy stone and mixing a kind of mortar to lay them in.

It was hard, laborious work, and the slave driver was a hardened brute who gave them no rest.

Barney suspected that he had been put up to this by the villain Ward, and intimated as much to Pomp.

"Golly, I done fink dat am so!" agreed the darky; "but I clar fo' goodness, if he gib me one mo' cut wid dat whip, I will hab his heart fo' it, if I'se killed de nex' minnit!"

Pomp was in earnest.

The brutal slave driver had cut his body with the whip until he was bruised and bleeding.

It was literal barbarity, and all without provocation. The injustice of the thing stung Pomp.

The driver, however, seemed to have singled Pomp out as the butt of his ill will. Once more he cracked the brutal whip across Pomp's back.

The darky could stand it no longer. He turned like a flash.

"Don yo' ebber dare fo' to hit dis chile wid dat whip agin!" he cried. "I jes' hab yo' life fo' it!"

This was insubordination, and a light of madness leaped from the slave driver's eyes.

CHAPTER XX. ENTERTAINING ROYALTY.

The slave driver was madder than words could express at Pomp's declaration.

He did not understand the words, but the gestures were comprehensive. His savage brow was contorted.

In his own tongue he launched forth invectives at Pomp.

Then up came the cruel whip, and this time it left a livid welt across the darky's back.

This was enough.

Better to die than to submit to such treatment. Pomp made a savage spring forward.

He caught the wretch by the throat and bore him instantly backward. Then he wrenched the whip from the brute and laid it over him until he fell senseless with blood streaming from wounds inflicted.

It was "turn about for fair play," and Pomp's revenge was sweet.

None of the slaves dared to interfere, but Barney cried:

"Good fer yez, naygur. I glory in yer spunk. Av yez need any help say so!"

But other slave drivers were rushing to the spot. Their faces were blazing with anger and hatred.

It was certain that Pomp would have received a terrific beating, if not been killed outright by the maddened savages, but for an intervention.

Suddenly there appeared upon the scene half a dozen native soldiers.

They rushed forward, with loud cries, and just in time to prevent the beating which Pomp would have received.

The slave drivers fell back at the words of the captain of the soldiers.

Barney and Pomp were amazed when they were suddenly led away in the file of men, and treated with more deference and courtesy than they had known yet.

"Begorra, that's queer!" muttered Barney. "Phwat the devil is up now?"

"Golly, I don' jes' know!" said Pomp. Then a chilling thought struck him.

"P'raps dey am gwine fo' to take us to de town agin an' cut our heads off."

"Bejabers, I'd rayther they'd do that than to kape stingin' us wid dat whip-lash!" declared Barney.

"I done fink it am all up wid us, Iish!"

"Och hone, it's a pity to kill two sich elegant gentlemen, ain't it, naygur?"

"It am dat!"

In spite of the seriousness of their position Barney and Pomp could not help making facetious remarks. The spirit of wit and mischief in the breast of both was keenly alive, and would only be suppressed with death.

Away they were led through the streets of the town.

A great rabble followed at their heels, but they kept on until at length a halt was made before the entrance of a mighty court-yard, high walled and paved with blocks of stone, and beyond which could be seen the walls of a large building.

Barney and Pomp both guessed correctly that this was the palace of the Belot king.

A long line of guards extended through the court-yard.

Between these the prisoners were led, and now they saw the king himself, a powerful framed but jovial-looking savage, seated upon a throne made of stone.

Straight up to this the prisoners were led.

The guard knelt, but Barney and Pomp remained standing.

The king smiled, and made a gesture with his right hand.

Of course neither Barney nor Pomp understood it, but the quick-witted Irishman said:

"Shure an' I kin see his game, naygur. He's curious to know somethin' about our people, where we come from, and phwat we're aloike. Do yez see?"

"Golly! I done fink dat am so," agreed Pomp. "Now dat Ward am not here, we mebbe kin make frien's wif dese people."

It was to the two prisoners a brilliant thought, and they instantly decided upon a plan of action, which was to make themselves as agreeable to the king as possible.

The monarch attempted to make them understand him, and by close watching Barney was able to comprehend a part of his meaning.

"From what country do you come?" the Belot king asked by signs.

After some effort Barney managed to make reply:

"A mighty country far over the sea."

"What are your people like?" asked the king.

Barney looked at Pomp.

"Now is our chance!" he said. "If we make a good impression we are saved. Phwat the devil will we do?"

"Hum!" said Pomp, thoughtfully. "S'posin' yo' jest sings a song!"

"Be jabers ye're a better singer than I am."

"Yo' sing fust off an' I will sing aftah yo'," said Pomp.

"All roight, naygur!"

So Barney sang richly a quaint old Irish ballad, full of pathos and of feeling. The Belot

king listened spell-bound. When Barney had finished, he turned and gave excited orders to his men.

Instantly rugs were brought and laid before them. A pot of some sort of sweet smelling incense was also placed by their sides.

Then the king motioned for more.

The two cute servitors of the great inventor saw that they had caught on great. It meant life or death, and they were willing by all means to live.

So Pomp sang: "Down upon the Suwanee River," "Old Black Joe," and various other quaint plantation melodies.

The native king was delighted. Jars of some peculiar kind of wine much resembling the scuppernong grape were brought and placed before the prisoners.

This touched the weak spot, and Barney and Pomp threw themselves into the spirit of the occasion.

They tasted of the wine, liked it, and then drank copiously.

The king also drank.

"Hum! dis am mos' as good possum stew!" declared Pomp, as he tossed off another bumper. "Wha' yo' say, Iish?"

"Be jabers av I had me choice betwixt an bechune it an' Oirish whisky I'd have a divilish harrud time to tell which I'd rather have!" averred Barney.

All now became hilarious.

The Belot king seemed to appreciate the fact that he had fallen in with two of "the boys," and was disposed to pitch in for a hilarious time.

He gave sharp orders which resulted in the courtyard being cleared.

Only two guards were left with the king, who pitched in for a good time with his new-made friends.

It is an ancient fact that royalty loves entertainment and will accept it from one source as well as another, so long as it is of the right kind.

And Barney and Pomp had caught on quickly with the Belot king.

The two rogues appreciated the fact and proceeded to make the most of it. They sang songs, imbibed the wine and pitched in for a good time.

While the king could not make them understand his language, they soon became quite proficient in sign talk.

"Begorra, Pomp," said Barney, after a time, "let's give his nibbs some acrobatic feats."

"A'right, Iish. I'se wid yo'."

With this they proceeded to do some ground and lofty tumbling in which they were quite fine.

Indeed, in his younger days Barney had once traveled with a circus, and was away up in G in such matters.

All this pleased the native king immensely. His royal highness was getting quite full from the effects of the wine, and was extremely good natured.

But Barney and Pomp, although they were heavily loaded with the liquor, had no idea of getting intoxicated.

There were too many interests at stake to do this.

So they now ceased partaking of the wine. The king now began to relapse into a stupor.

"Bejabers, it's dhrunk he is, naygur," whispered Barney. "Phwat the devil will we do now."

The words were barely out of his mouth when an appalling thing happened. Suddenly a guttural voice sounded in their rear.

Both turned to see a tall, dark-featured, savage-looking fellow standing over them. By his side were a half dozen armed guards.

The fellow was probably a prince of the realm, and he was exceedingly angry at the state of affairs.

He gave sharp and angry orders to his men. In an instant they had seized the two prisoners and dragged them forward.

Barney and Pomp were thrown upon their knees, and their heads were bent forward to expose their necks.

Over them stood a powerful fellow with a monster club. The frightful purpose was most plain, and this was to break their necks with the clubs.

Words cannot express the horror and despair of Barney and Pomp at that moment.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CATAMARAN RELEASED.

The capture of the electric gun by the Belots was to Frank and his companions a most appalling catastrophe.

In that moment all their plans seemed baffled, and the shadow of an awful fate seemed settling down upon them.

"They have captured the gun, and Barney and Pomp!" gasped Dr. Vaneyke.

"Heavens! all is up!"

"What shall we do?"

"We must not give up without a struggle!" cried Frank, excitedly. "Come, one and all. We must save them!"

The others needed no bidding.

All seized their weapons and started for the hill. They fired as they ran, but before they could reach the summit the Belots had gone, carrying away their prisoners and the electric gun as well.

Frank in his impetuosity would have pursued the wretches to the very gates of their city.

But at this moment a warning cry came from Beals.

"Look out!" he cried, "they have started for the catamaran. If they get possession of that we are lost indeed."

This was true.

The Belots in great numbers were swarming from a neighboring jungle toward the catamaran. Frank saw that no time was to be lost.

All depended now upon the catamaran.

Frank regretted too late that he had removed the electric gun at all. It would have seemed far better policy to have first liberated the air-ship.

Back to the catamaran went the voyagers at full speed. They were not a moment too soon.

Several of the Belots had reached the rail.

Frank and his companions gave them a volley and then rushed aboard the air-ship.

But the situation was now most alarming. From all sides throngs of Belots were surging forward to the attack.

"Quick, or we are lost!" cried Frank.

A terrific volley from the Winchesters was given the savages. Then Frank rushed with all haste to the dynamo room.

It will be remembered that wires had been placed all about the catamaran, through the grass and along the ground. A number of the Belots had already become entangled in these.

Quickly Frank pressed the key which sent the current through the wires.

The effect was thrilling.

The wires were nearly as deadly as the electric gun. Those of the foe who came in contact with them were made sorry.

They were lifted and hurled back as if with

giant hands. Where any received the full force of the current they were instantly killed.

It was a death girdle about the catamaran. Those who succeeded in passing the wires were shot down.

The ground was heaped with the dead foe. Nothing human could withstand such a state of affairs.

The Belots were brave, but the hidden, mysterious, unknown force was to them very strange and terrifying.

They could not withstand the powerful wave of superstition which would assert itself, and accordingly yielded to the impulse to flee.

They broke, and in much confusion retired. It was another victory for the explorers.

"Hurrah!" cried Beals, triumphantly. "We are not conquered yet, although they have got our electric gun."

"You are right!" cried Frank. "We shall give them a royal tussle before we yield, depend upon it!"

"With their ardor cooled by this defeat the Belots retired and presently not one of them was to be seen anywhere.

This was most encouraging for the explorers and determined Frank upon a new move.

A conference was held.

It was agreed that extreme measures must be resorted to. The fate of Barney and Pomp was unknown, but if alive and prisoners they must be rescued.

Frank proposed to at once go to work to liberate and repair the catamaran.

But as all gazed at the tons of rock which held it down they felt discouraged and doubtful.

But the young inventor was not to be baffled by this obstacle. Quickly he went into the cabin.

When he came out he brought with him the sections of several queer looking machines.

"Do you know what these are?" he cried.

"I must say that we do not," said Dr. Vaneyke. "What are they?"

"A new invention of mine."

"Always an invention!"

Frank laughed merrily.

"I would cease to be an inventor," he said, "if I did not produce something new now and then."

"Well, what are they?"

"Electric drills. With these I will show you how very quickly those tons of rock will yield."

Then the famous inventor proceeded to show the working of the drills.

It was a simple matter to set them in frames over the rock, and connect a cylinder containing a dynamo with a wire. The machinery of the drill did not differ greatly otherwise from the ordinary steam drill.

But the motive power was, of course, electricity instead of steam.

There was an abundance of force aboard the catamaran to operate a hundred of these drills with ease.

Everybody was enthused with the idea, and the drills were at once put to work.

Soon the air was ringing with their sound. Block after block of the huge ledge was cut away in this manner.

Until late at night, under the glare of the search-light, they worked.

When daylight came only a small fragment held the bow of the catamaran imprisoned.

This was quickly removed, and the air-ship was free. It was a clean-cut job and a big victory.

Moreover, to his joy, upon examination,

Frank found that the damage to the ship's bow was so slight that it was not necessary to repair it at once.

The catamaran was all ready for another aerial flight. Once more the future began to look bright and propitious.

Three rousing cheers were given when at length it was seen that the catamaran was at liberty.

"Now, Frank!" cried Dr. Vaneyke; "what is to come next? Have you not a plan of action?"

"That I have," replied the young inventor, readily, "but we cannot operate it in daylight."

"Ah, what is it?"

"Wait until darkness comes and you shall see!"

But the day had well nigh passed anyway, and it was not long before darkness came again.

Then Frank regulated the machinery carefully, went into the pilot-house and pressed the key which impelled the rotascopes.

They began to hum at once, and into the air sprang the air-ship.

It was a novel thing for Beals and he was delighted. He went to the rail and looked over.

But all was darkness below save just where the lights of the Belot city broke the gloom.

The air-ship hovered over the city like a bird of night, and the voyagers kept good watch of the streets.

Not a light was permitted aboard the catamaran, for Frank did not want the savages to know that the air-ship was released and afloat.

The young inventor brought the catamaran to a point just over the huge building which all had agreed was the prison.

Here he held the air-ship steady and then sent the rays of the search-light down through the darkness.

The effect was simply wonderful.

Every part of the building was illuminated as if in broad daylight. What was more, an astounding revelation was made.

In the middle of the prison building there was a broad courtyard. This was lit up as bright as day.

And there, just risen from a stone settee, as if in fright, were two female forms. It needed but a glance for Beals to shout:

"My soul! it is Harriet and Mrs. McLain! We will rescue them."

Frank held the search-light upon the courtyard for a full minute. Vernon Beals leaned far over the rail and shouted:

"Have courage, Harriet! We have come to save you!"

Then Frank instantly shut off the light, for he was fearful of attracting the attention of the Belots. Whether they saw it or not, it was not easy to say. Doubtless they might have regarded it as some wonderful meteoric display, for it did not seem that any sensation was created. But the question now was how to rescue the two women.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PLUCKY RESCUE.

WHETHER the captive women heard his voice or not Beals was not quite sure. He hoped that they had, however, and that they would remain in the courtyard.

Frank had wisely shut off the search-light. All was profound darkness. But the location of the courtyard could be easily determined.

All on board the catamaran were very much

A plan of action was quickly formed. A huge basket similar to that used in ballooning was brought out from the cabin of the catamaran.

To this was attached a stout rope, and the basket was let down over the side of the airship.

Beals had volunteered to descend in the basket and rescue the two women. Of course the risk would be great, but he did not stop to think of this.

Frank Reade, Jr., Ferry and Dr. Vaneyke had hold of the rope.

"Let her go!" cried Beals, as he stepped into the basket.

Down went the basket and its occupant until it hung right over the courtyard. A little lower and it descended right into the place.

Beals sprung out of the basket. There was a dim light burning beyond an archway leading into the prison. Here the young adventurer saw two dark forms.

He had no means of knowing whether they were enemies or not. But there was no time for ruminations.

The risk must be taken, and he did not hesitate to take it. Quickly he gave a shrill, tremolo whistle.

"Harriet—Mrs. McLain!" he exclaimed. "Are you there?"

In an instant he heard a faint cry, and then a light form came flitting through the gloom.

"Vernon!" said a soft, thrilled voice. "Is it you?"

"Harriet, my own darling!" cried the lover, rapturously. "I am so glad to see you!"

In a moment she was folded in his arms. That was a moment of thrilled sublime happiness for the lovers.

But there was no time to lose. Danger was imminent, and despite his felicity Vernon realized this, and that he must act at once and quickly.

Mrs. McLain had now reached his side and clasped his hand warmly.

"I am so glad to see you, Vernon," she said. "You have come to rescue us?"

"Yes."

"But—how will you do it?"

"Ask no questions just now," said Vernon, hastily, "but get right into this basket—"

"Basket!" exclaimed Mrs. McLain, in amazement. "Is it a balloon?"

"Ask no questions."

Vernon's request was complied with. Mrs. McLain and Harriet entered the basket. There was a vivid flash of light from the clouds seemingly.

It was from the search-light above, and by it Vernon had made signs to those on board the airship to pull away.

Up went the basket into the air, swinging and gyrating. In a moment it was out of Vernon's sight.

The young explorer remained in the courtyard waiting for the return of the basket. He could see nothing above, but heard plainly the creaking of the rope.

Time passed. He had begun to wonder at the tardiness of his friends above, when he experienced a thrill.

This was of genuine alarm, and there was good cause for it. There was somebody else now in the courtyard.

He heard a guttural voice, and saw a dark form emerge from the archway.

Instinctively Vernon realized that it was one of the Belot jailers.

The fellow had, no doubt, come in to look after his prisoners.

The position of Beals was a peculiar one.

At this moment there was a scraping sound above. Then there came a flash from the search-light.

The basket was seen sliding down the roof. But the same flash of light enabled the Belot jailer to see it also.

The fellow saw the air-ship as well, and instantly realized the situation.

A terrific yell pealed from his lips. He rushed toward Beals like a thunderbolt.

Instantly from every quarter of the prison there came a terrific uproar.

The alarm was on.

Vernon experienced an awful chill. His first impulse was to rush for the basket.

But the Belot jailer was close upon him. In another minute the yard would be filled with foes.

There was no time to squander. Quick as a flash Vernon squared off.

He was an expert boxer. As the jailer rushed at him he drew back and let him have a crack in the face.

The Belot staggered and received a crack on the jaw, one in the jugular and an uppercut in the cheek. But yet through some remarkable tenacity he maintained his grip and closed with Vernon.

A fearful wrestle followed.

In this the young Englishman was expert. He quickly whipped his adversary over and making a shoulder lock brought him to the stone floor with a crash.

There the fellow lay insensible.

The basket now lay upon the ground. Vernon made a spring for it. But his troubles were not yet over.

Into the yard sprung a half dozen of the Belots. They were armed with clubs and carried torches, which lit up the place.

Beals saw that he had not time to reach the basket before they would be upon him. Fortunately he had a brace of pistols in his belt.

Quick as a flash he drew these and opened fire upon the crowd. Of course the sounds of the conflict reached the ears of those above.

In a moment Frank had turned the glare of the search-light downward and illuminated the courtyard.

This revealed the thrilling scene in its entirety.

"My God!" cried Prof. Philosophus, "he is lost. They will kill him!"

"Oh, save him!" screamed Harriet, who had just recovered from her shock of amazement at finding herself aboard the air-ship. "Don't let them kill him!"

"Have no fears," said Frank Reade, Jr., coolly. "We will save him!"

Frank had seized an electric bomb. But he saw at a glance that it would not be safe to use this.

The Belots, however, were being held at bay by Vernon. The revolvers had for a moment held them back.

Seeing the position at a glance Frank leaned over the rail and shouted:

"Jump into the basket, Vernon. We will lift you."

Beals was now able to do this. He kept up a fusillade with his revolvers which kept the foe at a distance.

Those above gave way at the rope and up went the basket. The Belots hurled their arrows and javelins, but fortunately none of them did Vernon any harm.

Quickly he was beyond reach. At this moment a man appeared in the courtyard who was recognized by all.

He was furious, indeed raving in his madness at the fact that the women captives were gone.

It required but a glance for those above to recognize him as Alfred Ward.

The villain was so enraged that he shook his fist at the glare of electric light above and yelled:

"Curses on ye all! Ye've got the best of it just now, but I'll have the hearts of the whole of ye. Revenge shall be mine!"

"Take care, Alfred Ward," replied Frank Reade, Jr., warningly. "I hold your life at this very moment in my hand. I could kill you at a blow!"

"A fate he deserves," said Ferry, with earnestness.

"That is right," agreed Dr. Vaneyke. "I don't know why you should spare him. He is a curse to humanity."

Frank held a bomb in his hand.

He hesitated. One move of his hand and he could hurl the villain and a score of his followers into eternity.

But he shrank from this.

He was always averse to taking human life. For this hesitation he was ever after extremely sorry.

Ward and his gang recoiled, and sought shelter in the prison. Beals was now aboard the air-ship.

Frank sent the search-light's glare over the prison and a part of the city, to take in the details.

It could be seen that much excitement existed there. The Belots, in great crowds, were thronging the streets, and making hostile gestures at the catamaran.

Frank Reade, Jr., carefully looked the ground over.

Then he turned to Ferry and Vaneyke.

"Well, Frank, what will you do?" the doctor had asked.

"I have made up mind!" replied the young inventor, rigidly. "I shall bring the Belots to terms. If they do not restore Barney and Pomp to me safe and well within twenty minutes, I will proceed to blow their city into perdition."

CHAPTER XXIII. BOMBARDING THE CITY.

THERE was no doubt but that Frank Reade, Jr., was in deadly earnest in what he said. The others listened gravely.

"Well, it is your only course, Frank," said Dr. Vaneyke, with conviction.

"Of course it is!" said the young inventor, positively.

"I cannot say that I blame you for the move," said Prof. Philosophus. "Something has got to be done at once in order to save Barney and Pomp."

"You are right."

"But how will you communicate with the barbarians?"

"There is but one way, and that is through Ward," said Frank. "I will prepare a message for him at once."

"But will it be safe to take it down to him?"

"Why?"

"He is treacherous."

"Ah, I will provide for that," said Frank. "I will put it in written form and in a cylinder. He can answer as he pleases."

"If he does not answer favorably—"

"Then I shall bombard the city."

"But Barney and Pomp may come to harm as well as others from the projectiles," argued Prof. Philosophus.

"I have provided for that," said Frank.

"Have no fears. I believe they are in the prison, and that I shall leave."

With this Frank went below to write his message to Ward.

Meanwhile, Vernon Beals had been making things cheerful and pleasant for the two ladies.

The happiness of being reunited was, for the two lovers, greater than words can express.

Both Mrs. McLain and Harriet were both wonderfully impressed with the marvelous mechanism of the electric catamaran.

It seemed to them all like a marvelous dream.

"Just to think!" said Harriet. "We are high up here in the air, out of all possible danger."

"So you are," said Vernon. "You need fear nothing further, my love. Happiness is ours now, for our troubles and dangers are over and we shall soon be back in civilization."

She turned her gaze upward into his handsome face with an angelic smile.

"Happiness, after all our sorrows and hardships, Vernon," she said, rapturously. "Oh, it is too good for belief!"

"And yet it is true!" he said, fondly. "Life will be brighter to us all now."

Frank in the cabin wrote a message to Ward as follows :

"To ALFRED WARD—You hold as prisoners my two servants, Barney and Pomp. I hereby call upon you to restore them or I shall take extreme measures. Take this warning! If you do not at once set them at liberty I will blow your city and all the people in it into eternity. Answer at once."

"FRANK READE, JR."

"I think the villain will pay some heed to that," said Frank; "he will hardly dare to disregard it."

Prof. Philosophus and Dr. Vaneyke nodded approvingly.

"You are right there, Frank!" said the former. "It ought to bring him to terms."

"If it does not, the electric bombs will!" declared Dr. Vaneyke.

So Frank went at once upon deck and threw the search-light's glare down into the streets of the city.

He saw a great crowd gathered near the prison, and among them he at once recognized Ward.

Frank allowed the catamaran to settle until it was within three hundred feet of the earth.

Then he held the cylinder over the rail and dropped it where it would fall at the feet of Ward.

It fell, and for a moment there was a frantic scattering of the barbarians.

They had evidently fancied it one of the dynamite bombs. But as it did not explode or do any harm, one of them had the courage to go and pick it up.

It was opened and the paper revealed. This was Greek to the natives, so they took it to Ward.

The villain was seen to read the paper. He made motions then that he would answer the message.

Frank lowered a small wire.

Ward wrote upon the paper and placed it in the cylinder. This he fastened to the wire, and it was hoisted aboard the air-ship.

Frank unfolded the paper and read as follows :

"To FRANK READE, JR.—I will say that you fire your electric bombs at the city at your own peril, and that of your two faithful servants, Barney and Pomp. The moment you open fire upon this city they shall die. If you want me to return them to you you must return the lady captives to me."

"Yours in hate, ALFRED WARD."

Frank gave a long, shrill whistle and tore the letter into shreds.

"That settles it!" he said; "there is no use fooling with these people any longer. So here goes!"

He touched the rotascope lever and the catamaran leaped into the air. Up several hundred feet higher it went.

Then Frank allowed the catamaran to float high in the air.

He was now over a part of the city which was some distance from the prison and the king's palace.

He had quite a number of the electric bombs on the deck, and these he now proceeded to drop over the rail.

The first one struck a house-top. The effect was fearful to witness.

In less time than it takes to tell it, there was nothing left of the building but a pile of stones and debris.

Another house was blown up in this way. Steadily the destroyer advanced.

The people, terrified beyond all power of description, began to grow panic-stricken and fled before the ruin in wild confusion. The great squares were surging with the terrified Belots.

"I'll bring them to terms," muttered Frank, grimly.

Surely it was awful punishment he was giving them. Yet somewhat curiously there seemed to be no thought of surrender.

In all his life Frank had had no experience with such obdurate people. It angered him greatly.

"They are unwise and foolhardy," he declared. "What consummate folly!"

The work of destruction went on. The deadly electric bombs were reducing the houses to heaps of ruin.

That Frank would have kept up the destructive work all night there was no doubt but for an incident.

The wind had shifted and a dense fog had come up.

All view of the country below was shut off. It was necessary to abandon the bombardment.

But Frank was satisfied.

"It is enough for to-night," he said. "Tomorrow they will come to terms."

The night wore away slowly. Daylight came at last, however.

The destruction thus far executed could be plainly seen. It was of most terrible sort. But now an astounding surprise was accorded the young inventor.

"Why!" exclaimed Dr. Vaneyke in amazement. "What does it mean? There don't seem to be anybody in the town!"

This was the truth.

Everything wore a deserted air. Not a single Belot was to be seen.

The amazement of the catamaran's party was intense. They exchanged glances and then scrutinized the scene below.

"I'll find out where they are," said Frank, grimly.

He dropped a bomb.

It blew the roof from one of the houses. Every room was exposed, but not one of the inmates were seen.

This was repeated several times, but not a Belot appeared. What did it mean? Here was surely a problem.

It was not at all likely that they were sleeping or affecting disregard of the deadly bombs.

It was plainly a fact that the city was de-

serted. In the night, under cover of the fog, they had left it.

Frank after some time arrived at this stunning and most amazing conclusion. But what had become of the Belots?

He was thoroughly mystified.

There was no use to talk; it was a peculiar state of affairs.

"What do you think of it?" Frank asked of Vaneyke and Ferry.

"I'll be hanged if I know what to make of it!" declared the elder scientist. "I am beat all out!"

"The same with me!" said Dr. Vaneyke. "I don't understand it!"

But Vernon Beals who stood near had heard all.

He stepped up to Frank, and touching his hat, said respectfully:

"Mr. Reade, I think I can explain to you why the Belots did not stand their ground, and that I can tell you where they are to be found at this moment!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SAND-STORM.

FRANK regarded the youthful explorer in amazement. Vernon emerged from the cabin where he had been with the ladies.

"Well," said the young inventor, tersely, "let's have your mind on the subject, young man. Out with it!"

Beals drew himself up and replied:

"You shall have it," he said, promptly. "In the first place, the Belots have the greatest fear of your electric bombs. They have realized that in order to save their lives they must leave the city. This is their motive for leaving."

"That is logical," agreed Frank. "But where have they gone?"

"Under cover of the fog they have made their escape. In the center of the city there is the mouth of a deep cavern, which is really connected with that in which the Shunokins, or People of Light, dwell."

This was a revelation.

"There is no doubt," continued Vernon, "that they have retreated to the depth of this cavern, and there they are now in fancied security."

"Indeed, it may be that they are in real security!" cried Frank, dubiously. "How on earth are we going to bring them to terms now?"

"Attack them in the cavern."

"But that is not so easy to do."

"Why not? The mouth of the cavern is large enough to admit the air-ship. If you could only contrive to put it on wheels—"

But Frank shook his head.

"That is out of the question," he said. "However, it is possible that the catamaran might float in on the river current, by lowering the rotascopes. The catamaran has been designed to travel on water as well as in the air."

"That is all right then," cried Vernon. "We can enter the cavern by means of the river."

"Very good; but how far would we have to travel underground before finding the Belots? Their hiding-place may be many miles from the point where we may enter."

"I do not believe it," said Vernon. "I think the river branches underground, and by following the tributary, we can very nearly reach the point where the Belots are in hiding."

"Is that true?" cried Frank, eagerly.

"It is."

"And you are familiar with the ramifications of the cavern?"

"Quite familiar. I ought to be, for, as a slave, I was obliged to toil in the place many weary hours. The main body of the river alone separates the underground territory of the Belots from that of the Shunokins."

"Ah, that is it!"

"Yes!"

"Do you think it likely that the Belots have taken Barney and Pomp into the cavern?"

"I should think it quite likely. However, I would first advise that the prison be searched thoroughly."

"A capital idea!"

At this moment Dr. Vaneyke stepped forward and touched Frank on the arm.

"Don't you think we had better look for the electric gun, Frank?"

"Of course!" cried the young inventor. "If they have not destroyed it!"

"I think that is hardly likely. Indeed, I have been studying an object near the city gates with my glass, and I feel quite sure that it is the gun!"

"You do?"

"Yes!"

"Let me take your glass!"

Frank went forward and studied the object for a moment carefully. Then he stepped into the pilot-house and sent the catamaran forward.

Very quickly the air-ship was right over the gates. Then it was seen plainly that the electric gun lay there half covered in sand.

The natives had attempted to carry it into the city, but evidently concluding that it was of no use to them had left it in this spot.

It was but a few moments' work for the air-ship to descend, and the gun was lifted aboard and placed once more upon the swivel.

It was practically unharmed and for this Frank was thankful. Certainly fortune seemed favoring the party.

"Now let's go back to the prison and look for Barney and Pomp!" Frank cried.

And back to the prison went the catamaran. Soon the air-ship settled down into the yard.

Frank and Vernon Beals, well armed, now undertook the search of the prison.

From one part of the building to the other they went, shouting loudly for Barney and Pomp.

But to all appearance the place was deserted.

"Enough!" cried Frank; "there is no doubt but that the prisoners have been taken into the cavern. We must look for them there."

"Which is correct!" agreed Vernon Beals. "Now, Mr. Reade, let us go back to the air-ship."

And this was done. But as they stepped aboard Prof. Philosophus pointed to the sky and exclaimed ominously:

"I don't like the looks of that, Mr. Reade."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank. "What is it?"

But the young inventor need not have asked the question. One look was enough.

The sky was a dull, copper color. The sun was obscured by a thin, filmy haze. A low, dull, moaning sound seemed to permeate the air.

"My God!" exclaimed the young inventor; "we are going to have a cyclone as I live. This is bad!"

The position of the catamaran was not a bad one, being protected by the walls of the prison yard. But Frank was fearful that the rotoscopes might be twisted off.

He was for a moment in a quandary. But Vernon Beals came to the rescue.

"I have the idea!" he cried. "Let us seek refuge in the cavern."

Frank caught the idea quickly.

He turned the rotoscope lever and sent the catamaran up. Like a huge bird it passed over the city and a wide tract of the country, finally hovering over the spot where the underground river emerged.

Frank here allowed the air-ship to descend until it rested upon the bosom of the river.

Its cylinders floated upon the water like a duck, and the propeller was put into operation.

A rudder was lowered, and the catamaran became a water craft.

Into the mouth of the cavern the air-ship glided.

And this was not a moment too soon.

There came a sudden blast of wind, a howl like that of a thousand dervishes, and the storm was on.

Prof. Ferry and Dr. Vaneyke were anxious to witness the warring of the elements, so the catamaran was anchored just in the mouth of the cavern.

Here the storm could be safely viewed. A more terrific or awful one the explorers had never seen.

At times the darkness of night covered the face of the country. The air was thick with debris and flying sand.

"My God!" exclaimed Ferry. "I pity any poor souls who may be out in that terrible storm. The deadly sandstorms of the Sahara are not to be compared with it."

"Indeed, it is terrible!" agreed Vernon Beals. "It looks to me as if the whole country was being buried in sand."

"That may be literally true!" continued the young Englishman, "for just above here there is a mighty desert covering miles of territory. The sand is of light quality, and no doubt this sand comes from there."

"It will be interesting to take a look at the country after the storm is over!" said Dr. Vaneyke.

And this was agreed to by Frank Reade, Jr. The terrific cyclone continued with unabated fury for several hours.

When at length the force of the wind ceased and the appearance of the sun was evidence that the storm was over, Frank allowed the catamaran to drift out of the cavern.

He turned the rotoscope lever and allowed the air-ship to leap into the air.

An astounding sight was spread to the gaze of the explorers.

"Where is the Belot city?" cried Vaneyke.

With stupefaction all gazed at the spot, which was now nothing but a howling, whirling waste of light sand. Buried beneath this completely was the city of the Belots. It was a thrilling and wonderful sight to contemplate.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LOST AERONAUTS.

It was an appalling scene upon which the explorers gazed from the deck of the catamaran. There was no disproving their eyesight. The Belot city had been completely buried from sight.

Not a house-top was to be seen above the shifting feathered pile. The two scientists, however, were the most interested.

They understood the philosophy of the thing well enough.

The desert above the city had simply been shifted by the mighty force of the wind down into this valley. This was by no means an unusual freak of nature.

"The thing has been repeated many times along the verge of the Sahara," said Prof. Phil-

osophus. "Indeed, there are authentic accounts of whole cities having been buried by Sahara sands, and there they are to this day. But this was certainly a sudden transformation."

"Sudden!" exclaimed Vernon Beals, aghast. "Well, I should say so!"

"It is awful," murmured Harriet.

"How lucky that we did not remain in that prison yard to await the passing of the storm," said Dr. Vaneyke.

"We would not now be here."

"I guess not."

"It is also lucky for Barney and Pomp that their captors took them into their underground retreat."

"And how fortunate for the Belots that they made their timely retreat," put in Prof. Ferry in ultimatum.

"Do you suppose that they foresaw this catastrophe?"

"I do not believe it," said the scientist. "How could they do so, I would like to know? This storm probably has no precedent to their knowledge."

"Correct," agreed Dr. Vaneyke; "but this settles the fate of the Belot city. Too bad you wasted so many electric bombs on it, Frank."

"Yes," said the young inventor, absently. "Well, I reckon we had better resume our search for Barney and Pomp."

"I am afraid their fate is sealed," said Dr. Vaneyke, sorrowfully. "I feel so bad for them. Poor fellows!"

Everybody echoed this sentiment. But before Frank could change the position of the catamaran a new incident occurred.

Suddenly Harriet McLain, who had been studying the sky, turned to Vernon Beals, who stood near.

"Really, Vernon, it must be an optical illusion, but it just seems to me that I can see a balloon over yonder."

"A balloon!" gasped Vernon.

"Yes; just look."

The young Englishman looked in the direction indicated and gave a startled cry.

Far distant in an upper current of air, he saw plainly the body of a balloon. It looked shrunken and tipsy, and seemed to be drifting at will with the wind.

For a moment he was so amazed that he hardly knew what to do. Then he turned and cried:

"Frank Reade, Jr.! Dr. Vaneyke! Everybody come here quick!"

His startled tones went from one end of the air-ship to the other. In an instant everybody responded.

"What is the matter, Beals?" asked Frank, excitedly.

"What has happened?"

"Has somebody fallen overboard?"

"Look! Look there!" cried the excited young Englishman, pointing to the sky.

"A balloon!"

All stood spell-bound gazing at the distant sight. None were more wonder-struck than Frank Reade, Jr.

All watched the distant balloon for some moments in silence.

"A balloon in this part of the world!" said Frank, finally. "What on earth does it mean?"

"I think it would be worth while to find out!" suggested Dr. Vaneyke.

"You are right."

Frank sprung to the pilot-house and turned the propeller lever. He sent the air-ship with all speed in the direction of the balloon.

The balloon was seemingly a dozen miles

away. The catamaran sped through the air at arrow-like speed.

As it drew nearer it could be seen plainly that the balloon was slowly sinking.

There was no doubt but that it had kept adrift as long as was possible. The gas-bag was rapidly decreasing in size.

There was visible sign of human occupants in the basket. What had become of them? Were they dead?

All these questions surged through the brains of the explorers. It was all a curious mystery. Why was this balloon thus drifting about at random in this part of the world? How had it come here?

Had the sand-storm brought it? But it was not at all likely that it had once come in contact with that.

The blinding, whirling sand would have cut the delicate gas bag to pieces in a moment.

That the balloon had been driven hither all this distance from some European country was neither probable. Altogether it was a great mystery.

But it was destined to be very shortly solved.

Nearer the catamaran drew to the balloon. The latter was rapidly settling.

Before the air-ship could reach it, it settled down upon a smooth plain. The catamaran also descended about one hundred yards distant.

Frank threw out the anchor and then leaped out himself.

The two scientists and Vernon Beals followed him. As they reached the basket they beheld a horrible sight.

In the bottom of the basket there lay two men, dead beyond a doubt. But this had not been for long, as one of them was yet limp. Aghast the explorers for a moment paused.

"My God!" exclaimed Ferry; "the aeronauts are dead."

"Perhaps not!" said Beals. "Let us make an examination."

They were lifted from the basket and placed upon the ground tenderly. But it was useless; they were dead.

It was evident that they had died from exposure and starvation. One was a tall, straight young man, with clear-cut features; the other was older and evidently a scientist.

The tricolor of France was wrapped about the body of the older man.

There was no doubt that that was their nationality. The car of the balloon was finely fitted up with astronomical and scientific instruments, which told the story.

"They came here for the purpose of astronomical observation!" cried Ferry; "possibly geographical research. See, this fellow was a member of the Royal French Society!"

The professor held up a medal which depended from the breast of one of the dead aeronauts.

All gazed sadly upon this wrecked and fatal expedition.

Then Frank gave a sharp cry.

He picked up a journal from the bottom of the basket, the pages of which were close written in French.

"This will tell the story!" he said. "Let us read it."

Frank could read French as easily as English. Upon the opening page he read as a memorandum:

"RUE DE VILLIERS, PARIS, FRANCE, Feb. 14, 18—.

"To-day we leave Paris, beautiful Paris, upon our great expedition to North Australia, where we will make observations for the new comet said to have appeared in Andromeda, and to be of the fifth mag-

nitude, and which it is believed will be better viewed in that part of the world.

"Also our Geographical Society has offered us costly medals if we will do some explorations in that unknown region. Upon this expedition we start today. May the God of the French be with us. Vive la France!

"We have constructed for our use one of the best balloons that money and skill will build. In it we shall ascend from Melbourne and trust to the favorable air currents to take us to the locality desired."

Then followed a dozen pages or more of scientific data which Frank passed over, and found the entries from day to day of the experiences of the aeronauts.

These described the incidents of the trip, how different air currents were made use of to carry them over the country. The latter of these was most pathetic.

The aged scientist was taken ill. Medicines seemed of no avail. The food supply gave out, and then the balloon became unmanageable and drifted away at random.

Several descents were made, but the young aeronaut dared not leave the basket with his sick friend in it. Every day both became weaker. They knew of no way to get food, and the air currents did not seem inclined to take the balloon back to civilization. The pitiable result is known.

Thus the journal closed. Had the catamaran been a day earlier in finding the balloon, possibly the lives of the unfortunate aeronauts might have been saved.

In the rear of the book were written two names, probably of the aeronauts.

"MONSIEUR FELIX LE BRUN."

"DOCTEUR ROUGET DE VARIN."

Sadly the catamaran's party were making ready for the burial of the unfortunate aeronauts. It was the most pathetic incident of the voyage thus far.

Graves were dug in the plain, and tenderly the aeronauts were laid to rest. A prayer was said over the grave by Dr. Vaneyke.

Then the records of the party were taken aboard the catamaran for further examination.

There was no time just now for that. The all-important matter in hand now was the rescue of Barney and Pomp.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BARNEY AND POMP ESCAPE.

BUT what of Barney and Pomp? We left the two faithful servitors in a desperate position truly.

Had the dark-eyed prince been permitted to carry out his purpose their heads would certainly have been lopped off at that moment.

But fortunately rescue arrived.

This was at the hands of one of whom it was little expected—no other than the villain, Alfred Ward.

Suddenly into the courtyard bounded Ward. He saw the two powerful executioners stooping over their would-be victims.

In a voice of thunder he yelled orders to them which caused them to fall back. The Belot prince turned upon him angrily.

Heated exclamations passed between them. The prince made a blow at Ward and the latter struck him down with his fists. A general row followed.

In the melee the two prisoners were hurried back to prison. Both were much disgusted with the outcome of the affair.

"Bejabers, I don't loike it at all!" cried Barney. "Shure the king is a gentleman, but the wondah whar dey am gwine?"

son is a fool an' I'd loike to plug his eye fer him."

"Golly, dat am jes' de size ob it fo' a fac," declared Pomp. "What am dey gwine to do wid us now, I'd like fo' to know?"

"Begorra, I'm av a moind that they'll have us kilt yit. Shure I thought we med a good impression on the king, an' av it wasn't fer the blatherskite of a Ward we'd have a fat time av it."

Barney smacked his lips as he thought of the wine, and was only sorry to think that he had not drank more.

Both were drowsy, and as there was nothing better to do, they fell into sleep. How long their nap lasted neither was able to say.

But when they came out of it, Barney sprang up, saying:

"Whisht! do yez hear that now? Shure, it's Misther Frank!"

There was a dull, distant roar and an earthquake-like shock. To the two prisoners it was comprehensive. They knew that the noise was caused by the electric bombs.

They knew that Frank was bombarding the city, and a wild thrill of joy and hope seized them.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "Shure, Misther Frank is comin' after us. We're goin' to be saved, naygur!"

"Golly! I'se done glad ob dat!" cried Pomp, ecstatically.

For some while the two comical fellows listened to the distant booming. Every time an explosion came, they would turn somersaults in their joy.

But after a time the sounds ceased. The conclusion naturally arrived at by them was that the Belots had surrendered.

But, in reality, it was at this juncture that the fog had shut down, and thus put an end to the strife.

Time passed. The two servitors waited anxiously for what they certainly believed would be the coming of a rescue. But it came not.

After a while footsteps were heard in the corridor without. The door swung open, and half a dozen stalwart Belots entered.

Barney and Pomp gazed at each other in dismay. Their hearts fell. This was most unexpected.

"What am all dis?" muttered Pomp. "Wha' fo' am dey come yer, I'sh?"

"Bejabers, naygur, it's to take us out an' kill us entoilore they've come."

"Golly! Dey amn't gwine to gib us time fo' to say our prayers, chile?"

"It don't luk loike it."

"Shuah dat am a fac'. Oh, dis chile am jes' gwine to die hard."

With rough, guttural exclamations the Belots compelled the two servitors of Frank Reade, Jr., to follow them.

Out of the cell they went, and finally into the courtyard. Here others joined them, and they were led into the street.

Here an astounding spectacle was presented. The streets were thronged with the barbarians.

A thick mist hung over the city like a funeral pall.

The strange people had their arms full of various articles, and many carried litters heavily loaded. All seemed on the move to some distant point.

It did not take Barney and Pomp long to catch on to the fact.

"Bejabers!" exclaimed Barney. "It's afther makin' a rethreat from the city they are."

"Yo' am right, I'sh," agreed Pomp. "I

But they were very soon to learn this. Between their captors they were led through various streets, and finally came to the mouth of a mighty cavern.

This was right in the heart of the city and seemed to extend an unknown depth into the earth.

It seemed to have been specially designed by nature as a place of retreat for the Belots in case of attack.

Into this cavern the two prisoners were led. As they passed from the outer air the spirits of both sank.

"Begorra, it's lost we are!" moaned Barney. "Shure, Misther Frank niver kin rescue us from here!"

"Don' yo' lose haht, chile," said Pomp, cheerfully. "Mebbe we kin fin' some way fo' to escape."

Barney, however, was not so cheerful. They were led deep into the cavern. Upon the banks of an underground river they paused.

Torches and bonfires lit up the place. The Belots crowded into the cavern by hundreds.

Time passed, and it seemed utterly impossible for the Belot king to bring order out of chaos.

Indeed, this very confusion was a godsend to the two prisoners. Pomp, who had been on the qui vive all the while, suddenly whispered to Barney:

"Golly, chile, I kin see a way fo' to escape!"

Barney quivered like an aspen.

"Yez kin, eh?"

"Dat I can, chile!"

"Phwat is it?"

Pomp placed his lips close to the Celt's ear, and whispered something in it which gave Barney a start.

The Belots were in a state of the wildest confusion from their evacuation of their city. An incident occurred which also served to divert their attention from the prisoners, and gave Barney and Pomp just the opportunity they desired.

The river, which flowed not ten feet distant, was swift and powerful in current. Upon the sands there lay a small boat made of light wood.

This was what had caught Pomp's gaze and suggested to him the idea of escape.

Only two of the Belots stood by them.

Neither of the prisoners were bound. It was a mighty chance, and they were desperate enough to accept it.

At this moment an incident occurred which aided them.

Alfred Ward had appeared upon the scene, and was having a savage altercation once more with the dark-eyed prince. Indeed, from words they went to blows.

Ward had a murderous temper, and whirling a club aloft, brained the prince on the spot.

The effect of this was terrible.

In a moment the Belots turned against their white ally. They rushed upon him with loud yells.

The two guards beside Barney and Pomp caught the excitement and forgot their charge.

They joined the avenging crowd, and the two prisoners stood alone.

Barney and Pomp had just time to see Ward killed outright. The next moment they were in the canoe.

Before any of the Belots saw them they were lost in the gloom of the cavern. They had made a daring break for liberty.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, wildly. "Shure, we foolded them. Now, naygur, whichever way shall we go?"

"Don' yo' git excited, Iish," said Barney, coolly. "Jes' keep right on down de ribber."

And this they proceeded to do.

Presently they came out into the main river. A brilliant light far in the cavern apprised them of their nearness to the home of the People of Light.

But there was nothing to fear, as the current was sweeping them in an opposite direction.

For some hours they were thus borne on. Finally daylight showed ahead, and they knew with intense joy that they were coming out of the cavern.

It was too sublime a realization to lose sight of. Their joy was without limit when finally they came out into day once more.

But what a scene lay before them! There had evidently been a mighty storm since they had entered the cavern.

Sand lay all about them. Indeed, climbing a height to take a look at the Belot city, it was not to be seen.

Only a plain of sand marked the spot where

it had been. Both Barney and Pomp were speechless with amazement.

But what had become of the air-ship? They looked about for it in vain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW PLANS—STORM DRIVEN.

"GOLLY!" exclaimed Pomp at length, drawing a deep breath. "Dere mus' hab been some kin' ob a cyclone since we uns went into dat cave."

"Bejabers, I should say so," said Barney, scratching his head. "Or else it may be that we've come into some other part av the wor'ruld."

"I don't believe dat," objected Pomp. "Here am suttinly de place whar we fus' looked at de city."

This was a fact. The two servitors had no alternative but to accept the fact that the country had been swept by a mighty tornado. This was an impressive discovery to Barney.

"Shure an' it was lucky fer us, naygur, that we went into that cave," he said. "Or mebbe we'd be underneath that sand now."

"Yo' am right dar, chile," agreed Pomp. "I spec'some ob de barbarians am suah buried down dar."

"I wudn't be surprised. But phwat of the cattymaran?"

The two servitors looked at each other aghast. The same thought was in the mind of each, and this was that the catamaran had been destroyed by the same awful storm.

That it could have outlived it did not seem possible. Both looked around fearfully.

"Shure, av it's the ind av Misther Frank an' the cattymaran, phwat the devil will become av us?" wailed Barney.

But Pomp's keen gaze suddenly caught sight of an object in the western sky. He instantly gave a yell akin to an Indian war-whoop and went to turning flip-flops.

Barney looked in that direction, and letting out a roar, went to doing the same.

The joy of the two servitors was of the frantic kind. They seemed wholly beyond control.

They were like wild Indians in their antics. The catamaran was certainly in the sky, and bearing down toward them. There was good reason for their joy.

The catamaran came on swiftly, and finally was directly overhead, at a height of a thousand feet.

For a moment Barney and Pomp were fearful that it would pass them by.

But Frank Reade, Jr., with a powerful glass, had been studying the ground below. With a thrill of joy he had seen the two lost servitors.

"Hurrah!" he cried; "there is Barney and Pomp. In some way they have made their escape."

It was a joyful announcement. Down went the air-ship and rested on the ground.

In a few moments Barney and Pomp were on board. It was indeed a joyful meeting for all. The dark clouds had cleared away, and the horizon once more looked bright and promising.

Mutual experiences were exchanged, and now new plans were discussed.

None felt any interest further in the Belots or the People of Light.

Ward had met with a fearful expiation of his crimes. None felt any keen regret for his fate. It was certainly deserved.

Of course, Vernon Beals and the women were anxious to return to Melbourne. Frank Reade, Jr., was meditating taking them thither.

But Prof. Philosophus and Dr. Vaneyke were not satisfied. The district they had come to see had not yet been fully explored.

Their desire for further exploration was strengthened by a remarkable discovery.

Among the effects of the dead aeronauts there had been discovered another journal.

This gave a thrilling and authentic account of the discovery of vast diamond fields which ought to rival those of Kimberley. Fine specimens were secured, and there was no doubt that skillful mining would unearth large fortunes.

It was not the intrinsic value of the precious stones that the scientists cared for.

Both were wealthy men. But the field of geological research seemed great, and the honor of discovery of the new Kimberley was greater yet.

Thus matters stood. For a long time it was undecided how to act.

Of course it was a large party for the catamaran to carry.

The weight not only strained the rotascopes, but the provisions were getting low. Thus matters were.

The practicability of leaving some of the party at a safe point until the return of the catamaran was discussed.

The objection to this was the fact that most of those to be left were ladies and the dangers of the country were great.

Bushmen and wild beasts would be almost sure to pounce upon them. The matter was certainly puzzling.

What was to be done? Frank Reade, Jr., was never so perplexed in his life.

But at this stage of affairs an incident occurred which effectually solved the conundrum.

All were in the cabin engaged in the noonday meal on the following day. A small yellow cloud unseen had crept up to the zenith.

A terrific storm equal almost to the one just experienced was close upon them. And nobody dreamed of this until the first warning came.

This was in the shape of a fearful blast which caught the catamaran up like a feather, whirled it about a hundred times or more, and bore it away upon its wings like a mere bit of cotton.

Frank and the others were hurled across the cabin. The dishes were smashed and things were turned topsy-turvy.

It was beyond all possible human power it seemed for a time to save the air-ship. It seemed doomed.

It was for a time completely at the mercy of the wind.

How the rigging and the rotascopes held out was forever a mystery to Frank. With the greatest of exertion he finally managed to reach the pilot-house.

In vain he tried to get speed enough into the rotascopes to rise above the storm. The catamaran was wholly in the power of the wind.

To add to all the propeller refused to work under such pressure. Then darkness came.

That was an awful night to the aerial voyagers. All that could be done was to keep the catamaran upright and keep the rotoscope shafts well oiled.

Several times Frank had given up the battle and believed that the air-ship was going all to pieces.

But she proved stanch. For hours the gale howled fiendishly. Daylight came at length, and the storm ceased. The catamaran rode high and steady in the air.

She was somewhat battered, but not at all cranky, as Frank saw, with joy. He went to the rail and looked over.

He knew that they had been driven a great ways before the storm, but was hardly prepared for the sight which met his gaze.

The mists were clearing away below, and there he saw high combing waves. A great cry escaped his lips. Instantly everybody was by his side.

"My God!" cried Frank, excitedly. "Do you know where we are, friends?"

"Where?" asked Vaneyke, breathlessly.

"Why, we have been blown completely over the Australian continent, and goodness knows how far out to sea."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE OCEAN STEAMER.

FRANK READE, JR.'S exclamation that the storm had driven them over the Australian continent and out to sea was a thrilling one to the voyagers.

But the mists were clearing away below and now they could see for themselves.

The hungry rolling sea lay beneath them.

How far they were from land they knew not.

But at all events the catamaran was going stanch and steadily and they were all safe and sound of limb.

This was a matter of deep congratulation, for it certainly looked squarely for their welfare at one time.

"Mercy on us!" puffed Dr. Vaneyke. "I thought we had surely done with the things of this life."

"It was a close call, doctor!" cried Ferry. "Our escape from shipwreck was very lucky indeed!"

"Bejabers, I was niver so shaken up in me loife!" said Barney, ruefully rubbing his skull.

"Golly, but I jes' about done up mah shin!" declared Pomp, ruefully rubbing that member.

The ladies of the party had been badly frightened, but were unhurt. Vernon Beals had remained by their side through all.

How far out to sea they had been driven Frank was as yet unable to tell.

After all had pulled themselves together Ferry ventured to ask Frank:

"Well, what shall we do now?"

"First I must get our bearings," declared the young inventor, "then I can answer that question. We will wait until the fog wholly lifts."

For an hour or more the catamaran floated idly in the fog.

But it gradually vanished, and just as it was rolling away even to the distant horizon, an object burst upon the view of the voyagers which gave them all a start.

Coming out of the fog not more than a mile distant was an ocean steamer. It was steaming along at a good rate through the heaving sea.

"A steamship!" cried Vernon Beals, excitedly. "And as I live, she carries the British flag!"

Intense excitement was created. Everybody crowded to the rail. The ladies particularly were interested.

The steamer was watched with deep interest.

Frank allowed the catamaran to descend until within less than a hundred feet of the water.

Those on board the English steamer had now caught sight of the catamaran. The rail was crowded with the crew and passengers, and the ship was seen to diminish speed.

Then up went a signal flag.

Frank leaned over the rail and waved the American flag. All cheered loudly, and this was answered by a vigorous hurrah from the British vessel.

Nearer the big steamer drew now.

The faces of the passengers could be plainly seen upturned as they watched the catamaran with wonderment.

The air-ship was to them, no doubt, a wonderful sight. It was doubtful if any of them had ever seen its like before.

They were within hailing distance now. A Jack Tar was in the steamer's foretop and sent up a lusty hail.

"Ahoy! up there!"

"Aye—aye!" replied Frank.

"What craft is that?"

"Frank Reade, Jr.'s Catamaran of the Air, from the United States."

"Well, I'll be keel hauled! Have you Yankees got to sailing ships in the air?"

"This looks like it, don't it?"

"Well, it does, a heap!"

"But what ship is yours?"

"The Princess Ida, from Liverpool for Melbourne, of the Australian-English Packet Line," was the reply.

A sudden swift and brilliant idea flashed through Frank's brain.

"Where are you bound?"

"To Liverpool."

Frank turned to Vernon Beals. The young Englishman faced him eagerly.

"I know what you are going to say," he said.

"You do?"

"Yes."

"You understand of course what it means to take these ladies along with us? The perils of a trip through North Australia are not to be enumerated in words."

"I know it well," said Beals, earnestly, "and while we are deeply grateful to you for all that you have done we feel that it would be better for all concerned if we could get passage on board that steamer. Were I alone, I would enjoy nothing more than to accompany you on your trip!"

"You are right," said Frank, "the course you propose is the best. But first let us find out whether the steamer will take you as passengers or not."

"All right!"

Frank again hailed the Princess Ida. Then Barney threw a rope ladder over the rail and Frank descended by it.

When he had reached a point even with the steamship's rail, he swung lightly on deck.

He stood face to face with the stout English captain.

Frank touched his cap and the captain did the same.

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., captain of the Catamaran of the Air."

"And I am Archibald Pendleton, captain of the Princess Ida."

They shook hands warmly, and then Frank concisely stated the object of his visit.

The captain listened attentively.

"We are ready at any and all times to take passengers," he said. "Especially those who

are in distress. Place the ladies aboard, and they shall have good treatment."

Frank returned quickly to the catamaran.

It became now a question as to how to transfer the ladies to the steamer.

In the brisk breeze blowing, it was extremely dangerous to bring the catamaran too near the rigging of the steamship.

But a boat put out from the Princess Ida, and waited until a basket was lowered from the air-ship.

In this way, one at a time, the ladies left the catamaran.

They bade a kindly farewell to the crew of the catamaran, and warmly assured Frank Reade, Jr., of their especial gratitude to him.

Safely on board the Princess Ida, Vernon Beals and Mrs. McLain and Harriet waved an adieu.

Then the steamship started, and the catamaran sprang into the air.

"Back to the land!" cried Frank. "We are rid of all encumbrances now, and can explore North Australia without any hindrance."

Of course this delighted the two savants, Ferry and Vaneyke.

They foresaw now nothing but a grand opportunity to further their studies in science and natural history. They anticipated rich additions to their collection of specimens.

As for Barney and Pomp, they were ready for anything new in the line of adventure or sport.

It was decided not to return to the locality of the Belots.

The northern part of Australia was outlined on the map as the objective point, and the catamaran was put to full speed to get there.

The next morning after an all night's sail the voyagers awoke to find a vast stretch of the wildest country they had ever seen spread below them.

They gazed down upon it with wonderment. Plain and mountain and valley were blended in one. Prof. Philosophus and Dr. Vaneyke were of course anxious for a chance to do some exploring.

Frank acceded to their requests and the catamaran descended.

A clear, open space on the side of a small hill was selected as a good landing place.

Here the catamaran rested. The two scientists prepared to lead the air-ship on an exploring tour.

This time they felt reasonably sure of immunity from bushmen or roving natives, for the region seemed to hold no sign of human life.

All was primeval wilderness.

The size of the trees was something enormous. One of them, a perfect monster, and a rival of the celebrated redwoods of California, Prof. Terry pointed out as a giant fig tree.

Barney and Pomp were skeptical, but the scientist proved beyond a doubt that he was right. The Australian fig tree grows to gigantic proportions.

Frank Reade, Jr., anchored the catamaran securely. He had some desire himself to do a bit of exploring in the neighborhood.

So he called to Pomp, saying:

"Pomp, get out our Winchesters. While the professor and the doctor are butterfly and bug hunting, we will look for game."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BEAR HUNT.

POMP almost jumped out of his skin with delight at this proposal, while Barney looked envious.

It was a great favor for either to be chosen by Frank as his companion.

"A'right, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp. "Yo' kin jes' bet dis chile will be ready direckly!"

Then he flashed a sympathetic glance at Barney which the latter resented.

"Bejabbers, it's toime yez had an outing wid Misther Frank!" he declared. "It ain't often as he takes ye!"

"Huh! Yo' jes' stay to hum an' look aftah de ship!" sniffed Pomp. "Dat am all yo' am good fo' anyway!"

Barney glared at his tormentor angrily, but this was all the good it did. Pomp soon had things ready.

Ferry and Vaneyke went in one direction and Frank and Pomp in another.

Straight up among the mountains Frank led the way. For somehow they kept on without encountering anything like game.

Birds were plenty and of beautiful plumage also.

The lyre bird, the emu, the cassowary were all seen, and several specimens obtained.

Then suddenly from a copse there leaped forth a huge animal. It made away over the plain below with great leaps.

It was a specimen of the kangaroo tribe. A monster of its kind. Frank did not attempt to shoot it.

Then a nest of the little duck-billed platypus was found. These are a curious little animal which lay eggs and hatch young just as birds do.

But exciting sport was ahead.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" declared Pomp, as they entered a ravine. "Dey don' seem to be no sign ob possums round yere. I se bin lookin' in' fer dem everywhere!"

"You'll have to wait until you get back to South Carolina for them!" laughed Frank.

"Don' yo' fin' dere am any here?"

"I'm afraid not. The possum is essential'y a Carolina product, you know. Of course there are other species."

"Huh!" said Pomp, disappointedly. "Kain't say dat I like dat idee at all. Tain't very much ob a country whar you kain't skeer up a possum or two. My mouf am jes' itch'in' fer a bit ob good ole possum stew!"

Frank laughed heartily.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait a while for that!" he declared. "Wait until we get back to the United States!"

"I done wish I was dere now!"

"Oh, we'll have some fun here yet. Just hold on!" said Frank, reassuringly.

They were now well into the ravine. Just as they were passing a heap of brush Frank gave an exclamation and sprung back.

From the bush there suddenly lumbered forth an enormous specimen of a bear.

He was a perfect giant in proportions, and black as a coal. He started to climb the mountain side.

Frank instantly raised his rifle to his shoulder.

"Look out, Pomp!" he cried. "I'm going to give him a shot!"

"A'right, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, excitedly. "I se ready to help yo'!"

The bear had mounted a log which lay wedged in between huge boulders. Frank drew aim and fired.

Crack!

The bullet went true to the mark. It struck the bear somewhere in the shoulder. The result was thrilling.

Down the log he rolled in a heap, snarling and clawing furiously. Indeed, down the slope he plunged directly toward the two hunters.

"Will I gib him one, Marse Frank?" shouted Pomp.

"Yes!" roared the young inventor.

Crack!

Another bullet struck bruin. But it did not strike a vital part either. In a moment the bear was up.

All his anger was aroused. Straight at the two hunters he plunged.

But Frank had thrown another cartridge into the breech of his gun. He drew aim once more.

"Look out, dar, Marse Frank!" shouted Pomp.

But there was little need of this. Frank was looking out and he gave the bear the full benefit of the close range.

This time the bullet reached a vital part.

Bruin reeled, clutched the air frantically with his giant paws, and then fell in a heap.

His struggle was over. His attempts to punish his foes were abortive. The white man's bullets were too much for him.

"Hooray!" cried Pomp, excitedly. "We done fotched him dat time, Marse Frank. Huh! but ain' he a monster!"

"He is a big bear," agreed the young inventor as he surveyed the carcass. "He is the largest Koala, as the natives call him, that I ever saw."

"Wha' yo' say to take off his skin, Marse Frank?"

"It would not be a bad idea," said Frank.

"If you choose, Pomp."

But the darky never got so far as the attempt. At that moment an astounding thing happened.

From a crevice above, another bear had suddenly appeared. No sooner had he done so when still another came forth.

"Golly! dere am two more ob de big brutes!" cried Pomp.

But Frank's gaze was turned in another direction. Three of the bears had appeared upon the opposite mountain wall.

In the ravine two more had shown up, and back of them were others. In less than three

minutes our adventurers were able to count half a hundred of the tribe.

And every moment the number was increasing.

The place seemed to be a literal den for the brutes. What was more they had apparently smelled the blood of their dead comrade and were angry.

Straight toward the hunters they came at a long loping stride.

Frank Reade was astaghast.

"Massy sakes alive!" screamed Pomp. "Wha' am we gwine to do, Marse Frank? Dey done eat us up!"

"It looks like it!" muttered Frank, in dismay.

The young inventor, however, saw the folly of attempting to stand ground before such a gang.

It would be equivalent to little short of suicide. There was no apparent way but to retreat.

So down the ravine the two hunters beat an ignominious retreat.

After them, angry and snarling, came the army of bears. It very speedily became a race for life and a more than serious matter for the hunters.

It was at one time questionable whether they would succeed in reaching the catamaran or not.

Barney saw them coming and rushed out on deck.

The appearance of the army of bears was a matter of amazement to the Celt. He gazed upon the scene spell-bound.

"Tare an' 'ounds!" he gasped, "phwat the devil is comin' now? Shure an' if they don't run they'll never git here!"

But Pomp and Frank were making good time.

They were none too soon, however. Reaching the rail of the catamaran they sprung upon the deck.

One of the bears was so close upon Pomp that he narrowly avoided getting caught by the coat tails.

Into the cabin all three dived and shut the door.

The bears were legion in number and swarmed thickly upon the deck. As soon as Frank recovered his breath he cried to Barney:

"Pull up the anchor!"

The Celt was only too ready to comply. He went forward and managed to accomplish that feat through the dead eye, without having to go outside.

Frank's scheme to get rid of the bears was a bad one. He quickly started for the pilot-house.

"Phwat are yez goin' to do, Misther Frank?" asked Barney.

"I'm going to send the catamaran up," replied Frank.

"Shure, that's good, sor; but phwat av the curiosity seekers, Misther Ferry and Doctor Vaneyke?"

"They are probably in safe quarters," said Frank. "At any rate, we must first get rid of these brutes. They will claw things all to pieces!"

"All roight, sor!"

Frank threw back the rotoscope lever. In a moment they began to whir, and the catamaran shot up into the air.

Upon the deck there were probably a dozen or more of the bears.

They were taken up bodily, and the effect upon them was most peculiar as well as amusing.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VOLCANO.

Up shot the catamaran to the height of a thousand feet.

A more astonished coterie of bears were doubtless never seen. A number slipped over the edge and fell.

Some leaped, but the majority did nothing but cling on, and crawling to the edge, looked trembly down.

The situation now assumed a comical aspect.

The bear is an amusing brute when viewed at a safe distance. The brutes, in their alarm and surprise, forgot all about their foes.

They crept to the edge and looked down through that appalling space to the earth.

Then they danced, rubbed their eyes and ears, wrestled, and made grotesque antics, which were funny beyond all description.

Frank, Barney and Pomp, in the pilot-house, laughed vociferously.

"Golly sakes!" roared Pomp. "It am too funny fo' anyfing."

"Bejabers, they're comical enough!" cried Barney. "but howiver will yezgit rid av them, Misther Frank?"

"That is easy enough!" said the young inventor. "You don't know bear nature as well as I do!"

"Shure will we shoot them and tumble them overboard?"

"By no means!" said Frank. "I have a better plan!"

"Shure an' phwat is it?"

"I'll show you!"

Frank turned the lever back and the air-ship began to descend. They had drifted some distance and would alight in a different spot.

No bears were in the vicinity as the air-ship touched the ground. But those on deck made a scramble for the earth.

One lesson is always enough for a bear.

The brutes were satisfied with their experience with the catamaran. They would never attack it again.

In the wildest confusion they scrambled from the deck and beat a retreat up the mountain.

"They will not trouble us further!" said Frank, emerging on deck.

"Shure, it must be troublesome beasts they are, tohev attacked yez in the forst place," said Barney.

"It was our fault," declared Frank. "We shot one of their number. It was really not the right thing to do."

"Shure, thin, an' the bears were all roight," cried Barney.

"In one sense, yes."

At this moment Pomp gave a sharp cry and pointed beyond the mountain peaks.

"Wha' am dat, Marse Frank?" he cried.

"Suah, it done look lak a volcano."

Frank gazed at the distant sight for a moment in silent amazement. A great column of fire and smoke was rising from the summit of a mountain near.

It was certainly a volcanic eruption. The presence of a volcano in this region was to Frank a surprise.

He had not dreamed of such a thing. But there it was before his eyes. Mighty clouds of smoke almost shut out the light of the sun.

The eruption had just commenced, and every moment was growing more terrific. Distant thunder shook the air; the heat even of the flames reached the catamaran.

The voyagers regarded the wonderful exhibition of nature's powers in sheer wonder and awe.

Indeed, Frank had begun to think of changing the position of the catamaran to one of greater safety, when Barney cried:

"Shure, Misther Frank, an' it's the docther himself as is comin'. Shure, an' it's in thrubble he is!"

This was true.

Down an eminence toward the catamaran Dr. Vaneyke, with white face and disheveled appearance, was rushing.

He was flourishing his arms wildly, and was apparently in great distress. Frank was much alarmed.

All sprang out on deck to meet the savant.

"What's the matter, Vaneyke?" cried Frank, as he came up.

For a moment the jolly doctor could not speak he was so excited. Then he recovered his breath.

"My God, it is all up with poor Ferry!" he cried.

"Ferry!" gasped Frank. "What has hapened to him?"

"It is an awful story. Give me a little stimulant."

Pomp brought some brandy quickly from the cabin. The doctor partook of it and then went on:

"We were out prospecting and sighted a mountain peak which looked to us to be the crater of a volcano.

"We climbed it and found that this was true. We stood upon a narrow shelf of rock looking down into the crater.

"Red hot lakes of lava were there, and these were much agitated. Suddenly there was a boom like thunder and we saw the eruption coming.

"Knowing our peril, we started down the monstant side at full speed. We ran on at fearful speed.

"Suddenly Ferry gave a cry of horror. I turned just in time to see a great wave of lava coming down the mountain.

"My God! Vaheyke," he cried, "it will surely overtake us!"

"Indeed, I believed this myself and counted it my last hour on earth. On came the lava.

"But we turned an angle in the mountain wall, taking a new course. The lava stream went thundering on down at a point beyond us. I believed that we were saved.

"But at that moment I heard Ferry give a gurgling cry. He was behind me. I turned and the next moment he had gone from sight.

"I turned and went back. There was a deep, cavernous hole in the mountain side. I shouted down it, but no answer came back.

"I tossed a pebble down, and it seemed to strike water a thousand feet below. I gave my friend up. Oh, my God! There is no doubt of it—Ferry is dead!"

The awful horror of the doctor's hearers can hardly be imagined. All were overcome with emotion.

All liked Ferry greatly, and his sad fate was indeed pitiable. Dr. Vaneyke was quite overcome.

Frank Reade was the first to arouse himself.

"Come!" he cried. "We will gain nothing by staying here. We can and must save him if he is alive, and I will not give up hope!"

His words seemed to enthuse the others. At once action was made.

The eruption was still going on, but it did not seem so furious. It was decided to leave the catamaran where it was and go forward afoot.

This was done.

The catamaran was securely anchored. It was not long before they reached the base of the volcanic mountain.

Dr. Vaneyke had no difficulty in leading the way to the orifice through which Ferry had gone to his fate.

It was scarcely five feet in diameter. Frank Reade, Jr., bent down over the edge.

All was blackness below. It certainly seemed a terrible depth. There was little hope that Ferry was alive. Doubtless he had gone down to his death.

Yet Frank was impelled to shout down the pit. Again and again he sent his strong young voice down the pit.

Suddenly he lifted his head, and a sharp cry of joy escaped his lips.

"What is it?" asked Dr. Vaneyke, eagerly.

"I am sure that I received an answer," replied Frank, in thrilled tones.

CHAPTER XXXI THE VOLCANO'S INTERIOR.

THE declaration of Frank Reade, Jr., that an answer had come up to him from the pit on the side of the volcanic mountain into which Ferry had fallen, gave the others a great shock.

A great cry escaped Dr. Vaneyke.

"Heaven be praised!" he cried. "You don't mean it?"

But Frank had leaned over the edge and once more sent his voice down into the depths.

This time Barney and Pomp as well as the young inventor heard a faint, moaning cry far below.

"He is down therel!" cried Frank, wildly.

"And what is more, he is alive!"

A cheer went up from the others at this. It was certainly worth something to know that Ferry was not dead.

But despite every effort, the unfortunate scientist could not speak in a loud enough voice for those above to hear him.

So they were able only to venture a haphazard guess at his condition or position.

Again and again Frank shouted.

A peculiar hissing noise, like the escape of steam, filled the air. This drowned most other sounds.

The eruption was rapidly subsiding, and the mountain beginning to assume its normal appearance.

Frank Reade, Jr., arose, and for a moment all stood in silence, gazing questioningly at each other.

An idea had entered the brain of the young inventor.

After a moment's thought he cried:

"We have got to make quick action. It is necessary, first of all, to ascertain what Ferry's condition is, and devise a plan to rescue him!"

"Exactly," agreed Dr. Vaneyke.

"Pomp and Barney!" exclaimed Frank, "run down to the air-ship as quickly as you can and bring me a wire from the dynamos. Also bring along an incandescent globe."

"A'right, sah!" cried Pomp, and both started pell-mell for the catamaran.

Arrived there, it was but a moment's work

for Barney to uncoil some wire and attach it to the dynamos, with an insulated key to hold the current in check.

"Now, naygur!" said the Celt, brusquely, "if yez will shhtay here an' howld the key I'll jist carry the woire up ter Misther Frank."

"A' right, Tish," replied Pomp, readily, "Jes' go ahead an' say when yo' am ready."

"All roight!"

This Barney proceeded to do.

He carried the coil of wire, uncoiling it as he went up to the spot where Frank was. The young inventor took it and quickly attached to it a globe and electric burner.

Then he lowered this into the pit, at the same time shouting to Pomp:

"Turn on the current."

The darky obeyed. The platinum burner sputtered and suddenly gave forth a brilliant light. Frank leaned over the edge and looked down.

The darkness of the pit was dispelled entirely by the electric light. Down went the light until it was quite near the bottom of the pit.

The pit was seen to be a sloping funnel seemingly coated with a silicious substance and gradually enlarged as it extended downward.

The pit at the bottom was full twenty feet in diameter. From it there extended several passages leading deeper into the mountain and perhaps into the crater itself.

Upon the floor of the pit sat Ferry nursing a sprained ankle. This was the only injury he had received.

It was certainly a most miraculous escape for him, and how he had fallen that distance and survived was to stand for a living wonder.

The scientist scrambled painfully to his feet, and shouted with joy as he looked up and saw the faces of his friends above him.

But what he said could not be heard above. However, Frank shouted:

"Hold fast, partner! We will send down a rope."

Everybody was overjoyed to know that the aged scientist was alive.

Barney quickly procured a rope. A noose was made in it, and it was lowered to the bottom of the pit.

Ferry quickly slipped it under his arms. Then those above quickly pulled him to the surface.

The joy of the aged scientist at once more being on terra firma cannot be expressed in words. He was fairly embraced by his colleague, Dr. Vaneyke.

"I knew you didn't come to Australia to die, did you, old pard?" cried the doctor, excitedly. "We shall both live to reap fame and fortune yet."

"Pshaw!" cried Ferry. "I'm as lively as a cricket only for my ankle. But—I say!"

"Well?"

"Upon my word of honor, I never beheld a more wonderful sight in my life than is to be seen from the bottom of that pit!"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you notice a number of passages leading from it?"

"Yes."

"Well, standing at the bottom of the pit, one can look through those passages and actually get a glimpse of what looks like the interior of Hades."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do, and I can say that it is the first time in my life that I ever got a look at the interior mechanism of a volcano."

"It is worth seeing then?"

"Worth seeing! Look here, Vaneyke, I am hurt and can't go down there. But in the interests of science and knowledge I advise you to go down there and do some exploring."

The others looked aghast.

"Go down there?"

"Yes."

"But the mountain might blow up. Fire might come into this pit, which I believe is nothing but a small crater or outlet."

"True, but without risk there is no gain."

Ferry cast a glance upward to the summit of the mountain. It was yet hurling aloft mighty volumes of flame and cinders, but the flow of lava had practically ceased.

Frank Reade, Jr., caught the inspiration.

"Come on, doctor!" he cried, excitedly. "Let us go down. We will take the risk!"

Vaneyke did not hesitate.

"If you say so, Frank," he cried, "it is a go!"

"I do."

"All right."

Frank put the rope under his arms.

"Lower away, Barney and Pomp!" he cried.

"Let us lose no time."

Barney and Pomp were dying to go themselves, but they could only obey orders.

Down into the pit they lowered Frank Reade, Jr. When the bottom was reached he disengaged the rope, and Dr. Vaneyke came down behind him.

Then the two explorers beheld a sight which appalled them. Through the passages leading from the pit they beheld a perfect wall of flame.

The passages seemed to extend a distance of some fifty feet into the interior of the mountain.

Passing through one of them the two adventurers came out upon a broad platform of rock and beheld one of the most wonderful sights ever accorded the privilege of man. A mighty amphitheater with a vast dome like a roof covering acres and acres in extent. A boiling, tossing, heaving caldron below of lava, ashes, cinders and flame.

All this tumbling, tossing mass was raging furiously in the shell of the mountain. Near the edge of the rock table the heat was frightful.

But there seemed a draught downward through the pit, and this alone kept the explorers from perishing.

Far above were mountains of flame and smoke, borne by a mighty draught upward through the funnel-like cone of the volcano.

Spellbound Frank and the doctor gazed upon the sublime but awful spectacle.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HEMMED IN.

It seemed to them as if they were taking a look at the interior of Hades. It required no great stretch of imagination to see shapes and forms in those tossing fires of lost human beings expiating their sins.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Dr. Vaneyke. "Where is there a sight to beat this, Frank?"

"There is nothing!"

"You are right. Human tongue or pen could not describe it fitly!"

The dome above them was all ablaze, and far beneath were voids of black smoke and living flame. It was an awful grand and impressive sight.

Indeed, so near did it all seem that instinctively the two watchers could not help but feel for their own safety.

There were dull thunderous reports, rumblings, and at times it seemed as if the shelf upon which they were would fall.

But they were really quite safe.

The downward draught from the cone kept the flames and much of the heat from reaching them.

For some while they remained gazing in silent wonder upon the scene.

The whole shell of the mountain trembled with the tossing and heaving of that awful caldron of fire.

But there did not seem much danger of an eruption just now. For the time being at least they were safe.

Dr. Vaneyke was like a madman in his eagerness to secure specimens. He broke off bits of the ledge, and also fragments of the silica which lined the cave.

This he examined closely.

"It is queer!" he ejaculated.

"What is queer?" asked Frank.

"This!"

"What about it?"

"I have never seen this sort of coating in a volcano cone before. It is silica and is generally found in geysers. It is made by the action of hot water upon certain kinds of minerals, chemicals and sand."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, "for aught we know this may sometime have been a geyser!"

Dr. Vaneyke gazed critically at the young inventor.

"Do you think it possible?"

"I do."

"Well, on the whole I believe you are right," cried the doctor, excitedly. "It is not an unusual combination, a geyser and a volcano. If that is the case—"

The scientist's face turned chalky white, and he gave a convulsive gasp.

"What is the matter?"

"My God! do you hear that distant sound?"

Frank listened but heard nothing.

"No," he replied.

"It has stopped now," said the doctor, huskily, "but step back into the corridor here and put your ear to the wall. Listen!"

Frank did so.

He experienced a thrill. A sound was faintly audible like the gurgling of many waters.

"What is it?" he asked. "What does it mean?"

"It means that this is an active geyser!" declared the doctor, excitedly. "Just at this moment it is inactive, but at any moment it is apt to let forth its mighty volume of pent up waters."

The two men looked at each other.

"I understand you," said Frank, calmly. "If the eruption should come while we are here—"

"It would mean death!"

Of course this was an appalling fact. The passages of the cone would fill up almost instantly, and they would be boiled alive in the hot waters of the geyser.

The awful danger of their position now occurred to the two explorers.

For a moment both were so utterly appalled that they could not act. Then Frank with a shrug exclaimed :

"Ugh! this is enough. Let us get out of this as quick as we can!"

"You are right."

Both started for the main shaft of the geyser cone.

As they pushed on hurriedly, they could hear every moment plainer the gurgling of water, while the hissing of steam sounds which had from the first filled the place became intense. Each turned a white face upon the other. They were running at full speed.

"My God! we are lost if we don't get out of here at once!" cried Frank. "There is an eruption coming, doctor!"

"It will overtake us."

The walls of the cave now trembled as if with the shock of an earthquake. There was a jarring sensation as if great bodies of water were being hurled against the partition.

On ran the two men.

They felt the air getting thick with a dense vapor like steam. Then they burst into the main shaft.

Both had expected to find the rope there ready for them and their friends at the orifice above.

But to the horror of both the rope was gone, and the shaft was lit only by the light from the inner fires of the volcano.

The orifice above was closed and no light of day came into the place.

They were in a sealed trap, hemmed in by fire and boiling water, in the heart of an active geyser.

A more awful situation could hardly be imagined.

The two explorers were for a moment sick and dizzy with the awful realization.

"Heaven help us!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., with awful horror. "We are lost, doctor; we cannot escape!"

"We have got to die!"

"Yes."

"What an awful fate!"

"Ah, far beyond the power of words to express."

Overcome with horror and agony they could do nothing but mutely glare at each other.

"Oh, my God!" wailed Dr. Vaneyke, "to think that we should die in this awful manner. Oh, Frank, is there no way of escape?"

"None!"

The young inventor spoke hopelessly.

"We must then be literally boiled alive in this place."

"Yes."

"Do you hear that?"

It was the distant roaring and tumbling of waters cataract like.

"I hear it."

"The geyser is resuming its activity."

"Yes."

The place was fast filling with steam.

This was getting to be almost unendurable. The air was so densely permeated that one could hardly breathe.

Something must be done at once if they hoped to escape. But what could be done? Certainly it looked hopeless.

At first both had been inclined to simply wait for death. But now Dr. Vaneyke said:

"Let us do something, Frank. We might choose another form of death by leaping into the volcano's pit!"

But in that moment an inspiration came upon Frank. He gave a sharp cry and pointed to an angle in the wall which had until now escaped their notice.

It was but a moment's work for him to reach it.

Back of this angle, as he had hoped there was a passage, leading he hardly knew whith-

er. It mattered not, it seemed to offer an avenue of escape and this was enough.

He motioned to Dr. Vaneyke who was instantly by his side.

"What is it?" cried the scientist, eagerly.

"It looks like an avenue of escape!"

"I believe it is!" replied Frank. "At any rate let us try it!"

"Lead on!"

Together they started away through the passage. There was certainly no time to lose as a thunderous sound now came up from below.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS GIANT.

THE passage seemed to lead upward. It was lined with silica, just the same as the cone. The footing was slippery, and the passage soon took a sheer upward trend.

And here the two explorers were forced to come to a halt.

With horror and panting for breath they gave up the struggle.

"It is no use, Frank!" said Vaneyke, in despair. "We are lost, and might as well give up!"

"Yes," agreed Frank. "I can hear the water coming now."

The next moment the water came. It was over and around them in an instant. But the waters of a geyser are marvelously buoyant, and instead of sinking or being overwhelmed, the two victims were lifted upon the surface like corks.

Round and round, over and over they felt themselves hurled. Neither were they parboiled, for the first waters of a geyser are sometimes cold.

Up they went like a shot, and then they were hurled into the open air.

Full twenty feet they were lifted in the air and the next moment found themselves upon the mountain side with the water rushing over them. Neither were scratched or even stunned. In a moment they scrambled to their feet.

Above them to a height of full fifty feet roared the geyser. The waters now were accompanied with steam and were getting hot.

The two adventurers hastened to get out of the way of the boiling stream of water which now came rushing down the mountain side.

"Saved!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "Oh, Frank, how did it ever happen?"

The young inventor was himself at a loss to understand.

"Upon my word, I don't know!" he exclaimed. "It is a miracle. It was not meant that we should die!"

"No, but look!"

A loud cry went up from a point above them. Two forms came rushing down to the spot.

"Bejabers, av it ain't Misther Frank alive!" cried Barney, wildly, for he was one of them and Pomp was the other.

Barney and Pomp explained that they had remained at the geyser orifice waiting for the return of Frank and Dr. Vaneyke, when a startling thing occurred.

Suddenly and without warning there came a small landslide down the mountain, which completely covered the mouth of the orifice.

The horror of the two faithful servitors could well be imagined. They were in a perfectly frantic state until the geyser broke forth at another point, and Frank and the doctor appeared.

The catamaran was awaiting them below. No harm had come to it, and Prof. Ferry was aboard, nursing his sprained ankle.

So all went aboard, and matters were soon once more at rights.

"Let us proceed at once to the spot where the diamonds were located by Le Brun and De Varin," said Prof. Ferry. "I am anxious to ascertain if their reports were true."

"All right!" agreed Frank. "If I am not mistaken we are not far from them now. They should be in this immediate vicinity."

The catamaran made a course due westward. Frank was at the wheel. Time passed, and the catamaran sailed on rapidly.

Nightfall came, and it was deemed better to descend and wait for daylight to come again.

Accordingly the catamaran was allowed to descend. It rested upon the earth near a hill of broken ledges and boulders.

Supper was prepared and partaken of. The spirits of the travelers were high, and they gathered upon the deck in the evening to enjoy the balmy air.

"By Jove!" said Frank, lighting a fine cigar, "this is certainly a climate not to be beaten on the face of the earth. I am indeed in love with it."

"It is certainly grand!" agreed Dr. Vaneyke, "the air is as dry and soft as can be."

"Yes, and exhilarating all the same," said Frank. "By the way, doctor, what is that yonder?"

"What do you mean?"

"Can you not see? Upon yonder ledge it looks as if a giant stood there!"

"A giant?"

"Yes. Wait a moment."

Frank leaped up and ran to the search-light. He turned it upon the distant object.

All gazed thither with utter amazement. There upon the spur of the ledge stood a human figure, but of what awful dimensions.

It seemed fully nine feet tall. It was a powerful built man, nearly naked, and carrying what looked to be a huge club.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Ferry. "Is he a man or what?"

"I don't believe it," said Dr. Vaneyke. "It is a statue!"

"The evidence of some prehistoric race, then!" cried Ferry, excitedly. "Let us go thither at once and see."

Barney raised his rifle.

"Begorra, I'll mighty quick find out whether it's a statoo or not," he muttered.

But Frank intervened.

"Hold on!" cried the young inventor, "don't fire!"

"Begorra, there may be others there an' they may attack us," said Barney, apprehensively. "We must look out for that," said Frank, coolly. "Who will dare to go out there with me?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HUGE DIAMOND.

THE announcement of Frank Reade, Jr., created no little sensation. It was certainly a bold one.

There stood the giant form as immovable and mysterious as ever.

As Barney had said, it might be an image of stone, or on the contrary, it might be one of a band of giants, ready to pounce upon and destroy whoever ventured out to investigate.

If the latter supposition was correct, then it would be indeed dangerous to attempt such a thing.

Therefore, the others were silent at Frank's words. Again the young inventor said:

"Come! Will you not go out there with me, Barney?"

"Huh! I jes' goes wif yo' anywhar, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp.

"Bejabers, an' so wull I!" cried Barney, instantly.

This settled the question at once. Barney and Pomp appeared with loaded rifles.

They left the catamaran and struck into a little pass which led up to the ledge where the giant form still stood in the glare of the search-light.

The bare wall of this pass was revealed in the electric light. Suddenly as the three adventurers were passing through it Frank Reade, Jr., gave a start.

"Cæsar's ghost!" he ejaculated. "What is that?"

Then all saw in the blank wall of stone what looked like a ball of brilliant light, star-like in its intensity, though much larger in appearance.

"Be jabers, phwat do yez call it?" cried Barney, in amazement.

"Golly! I done fink it am de eye ob some big beast," cried Pomp.

"No!" said Frank, with inspiration. "It is nothing of that sort. Wait and we will find out what it is!"

With which the young inventor climbed up the ledge until he was but a few feet from the ball of light.

Then he saw at once that it was a huge diamond, large as a goose egg, set in the stone wall of the pass.

He could see a million dollars in the value of that mighty specimen of the most precious gem in existence.

"Heavens, what a find!" muttered Frank, with a sort of delirious joy. "This will be the wonder of the world."

"Golly, but ain't it a whopper!" cried Pomp.

"It is without doubt the largest and finest in the world!" said Frank.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "How iver will yez get it out av' there Misther Frank?"

"That will be easy. The rock can be cut out in a section around the diamond. It will be a vast treasure for us."

The two faithful servitors were so overjoyed that they danced a clog and an Irish reel.

But just as Frank was climbing down the ledge, Barney recovered himself and said in a hoarse whisper:

"Shure, Misther Frank."

"Well?"

"Phwat the devil has iver become av the big giant?"

Frank looked up and saw with much surprise that it was true that the giant was gone.

He had disappeared while they had been observing the giant diamond.

Frank, however, was not dispossed to give much thought to this. He was interested wholly in the big gem.

It was his intention to return to the catamaran and keep a watch upon the treasure until morning.

Then he would have it cut from the ledge and proceed to further search of the diamond fields.

But at this moment he heard a peculiar wailing sound up the pass. It was like the chanting of many voices and seemed to be every moment drawing nearer.

Then the flash of torches was seen and moving forms in the distance. In a moment Frank sprang down.

"Barney!" he cried. "Run back to the catamaran and turn off the lights!"

"All roight, sor!"

Away went the Celt with all haste. He had quickly obeyed the command and the surroundings were once more in darkness.

Frank and Pomp had sought refuge upon a spur of the pass and now beheld a strange procession coming down the pass.

In the glare of the torches the diamond shone with great brilliancy.

Now a strange thing was witnessed.

Down upon their knees went the giants in a semi-circle and continued their chant. Barney had now come up, and with Pomp was witnessing the curious ceremony.

Various ceremonies and forms were enacted. Then the band arose, and as they had come, marched away up the defile.

"Begorra, I never see the loikes av that before!" declared Barney, in amazement. "Shure, it's after makin' a god av the diamond they be doing!"

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Shure, the more fools they!"

"No doubt they regard it as the sacred light of their divinity!" said Frank. "I cannot blame them in their ignorance, for there is nothing else worthy of interest in this barren region!"

"Golly! I se Jes' gwine to agree wif yo' there, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp.

But what was to be done?

Frank was not long in deciding this question. It was proper to return to the catamaran and wait for daylight.

It would then be an easy matter to cut the diamond from the face of the cliff, and possess the most wonderful gem in the world.

But fate had decreed that this should not be so easily accomplished.

Suddenly, just as Frank was about to turn, there smote upon the air a number of guttural sounds.

From the gloom there sprung a number of giant forms.

In a moment the three adventurers were surrounded. Quick as a flash, Frank Reade, Jr., made action.

"Quick, Barney and Pomp," he cried. "Break for the catamaran. Run for your lives!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE GIANTS' DEN.

At the same moment, Frank pulled a revolver and fired right and left.

Giant forms went tumbling down, the air was broken with their roaring cries, and Frank was able to clear the way before him.

Barney and Pomp would gladly have done the same, but they were not accorded the chance given Frank.

Before they could get a rod from the spot giant forms were upon them.

They were pygmies in the powerful grip of their captors.

Finding themselves *hors du combat*, Barney and Pomp could only wisely submit to their captors.

But Frank Reade, Jr., had cleared a space about him, and now made a break for the catamaran.

The giants came after him full tilt. They were great runners but Frank had a good start. Dr. Vaneyke and Prof. Ferry on board the catamaran saw him coming.

At once they opened fire upon the giants, but the latter were not checked, seeming wholly devoid of fear.

Straight for the catamaran Frank ran and sprang aboard. He knew that all depended upon quick action.

He gave one swift glance backward to see if Barney and Pomp were coming.

But they were not.

Satisfied of this Frank rushed to the pilot-house. Springing in, he pulled the rotoscope lever. Up sprang the air-ship.

Up into the air it went like a rocket. Four of the giants had reached the rail and grasped it.

Not letting go their hold in time, they were carried up into the air still hanging to the rail.

But when apprised of the fact that they were leaving the earth, in their terror they let go.

The distance to the ground was fully two hundred feet.

It was safe to say that not one of them escaped instant death. It was a frightful fate.

It was a fortunate escape. But Frank Reade, Jr., did not forget Barney and Pomp.

When not more than three hundred feet in the air, he reversed the current and held the catamaran stationary.

Then he turned on the search-light, and let the rays flash into the defile.

The two servitors and their captors were visible nowhere.

"Where had they gone to? This was not an easy matter to solve.

But it must be done, and Frank was resolved to leave no stone unturned to do it.

Dr. Vaneyke now came into the pilot-house.

"That was a close call for you, Frank!" he gasped. "But what of Barney and Pomp?"

"I do not know," replied Frank, with deep agitation. "That is what I want to find out."

"Were they also set upon by the giants?"

"Yes."

"Heavens! then I fear it is all up with them!" ejaculated the doctor.

"Well, we won't give them up!" declared Frank. "I will raise the earth to find them. Depend upon that!"

Down settled the catamaran over the pass. The search-light's glare went into its every depth.

And now a singular discovery was made.

The pass itself seemed a long cleft in a mighty series of ledges fully a mile in length. But in the middle of this extent of ledge it was so deep that it was with difficulty that the search-light's glare was sent to its bottom.

Then vast cavities were seen to exist down below there extending how far under the ledges the observers could not say.

It was no doubt to this place that the giants had retreated. It was certainly a very singular den.

But not one of the giants were to be seen. They had no doubt sought refuge in this den.

No doubt Barney and Pomp were prisoners down there. That is, if they were alive, which fact had not yet been definitely settled.

Frank decided first of all to settle this. So he returned with the catamaran to the spot where the battle had taken place.

Here the air-ship descended and rested upon the ground.

A careful search was made, but no sign of the two servitors could be found.

"There is only one thing about it," declared Frank. "We must invade that cavern. But how shall we do it?"

"The catamaran can never get in there," said Dr. Vaneyke.

"Oh, no, I do not expect that."

Frank spent some time in earnest thought. He was of an inventive turn of mind, and though the problem seemed a difficult one he had soon hit upon a plan.

"I am going down into that place," he said. "I want your help, Dr. Vaneyke."

"You want me to go down with you?"

"I will explain presently."

Frank went into the cabin. In a small iron chest he found a number of curious looking discs and a pair of what looked like cymbals, which he fastened to each hand.

First he had connected insulated wires to these, and then several hundred feet of insulated wire to an electric battery strapped to his back.

This wire was connected with the dynamos, and thus equipped, Frank stood at the catamaran's rail.

The air-ship hung between the walls of the pass, and several hundred feet above the bottom.

The search-light was turned steadily down. A steel rope was under Frank's arms, the rest of it being upon an electric windlass, which could be made to lower or haul him up rapidly.

Dr. Vaneyke stood by the rail and steadied Frank as he went down.

"When I reach terra firma, doctor," he said, "turn on the electric current. When I give a pull on the rope, set the windlass going."

"All right, Frank!"

Then down went the form of the young inventor.

Down between the dark walls of the pass he went. Now he was below the roof of the cavern, and beheld a startling sight.

Fires burning at intervals lit this up, and Frank saw a perfect city of the giants made of stone blocks and skillfully built.

Hundreds of the giants were to be seen in this strange cavern city.

They were, however, just now congregated before a couple of stakes set in the ground, and to which were bound two men.

It required only a glance for Frank to see that they were Barney and Pomp.

It was certainly the purpose of the giants to burn their prisoners alive. Frank was there to rescue them.

Proceedings were interrupted by the new arrival upon the scene.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHICH IS THE END.

THE giants saw the form of Frank Reade, Jr., descending from above. For a moment they regarded him with utter amazement.

Then hoarse and excited cries went up. One and all rushed forward to intercept him.

The young inventor's feet touched the ground and he faced his legion of foes.

"Now or never!" he muttered. "All depends upon this move."

Barney and Pomp had given themselves up for lost. They witnessed the appearance of their master with amazement.

Frank had faced his legion of foes coolly and warily.

He knew that he was taking a mighty risk, but he was prepared for it. Straight for him the giants came.

He did not affect opposition.

He felt certain that the giants would not attempt to strike him down. They would doubtless attempt to make him a prisoner.

In which case Frank felt confident of giving them a hot reception. They were all about him now like bees.

Now was the time to act.

Quick as a flash Frank touched the nearest giant.

The touch was enough.

Over went the brute as if struck by lightning. He was knocked senseless. Right and left Frank sent the deadly blows.

The lightest kind of a blow was sufficient. The mere contact with the electric discs was enough.

A perfect heap of the giants lay about him. Infuriated, and not understanding the reasons for his mighty power, they tried to close with him.

But Frank was wholly invincible with that powerful electric force in his grasp.

A thousand of his foes could not have overpowered him.

He took good care to keep the path clear before him, for he knew that if any of them should sever the wire behind him he would be lost.

Right and left he dealt those herculean blows. Nearer every moment he drew to Barney and Pomp.

The giants were headlong and reckless in their valor. But such a repulse could not help but count.

They were obliged to draw back. Frank had actually forced his way to the side of the two captives.

He released one hand long enough to draw a knife and sever their bonds. Then he cried:

"Make a break for your lives!"

It is needless to say that Barney and Pomp needed no second bidding. Away they went like the wind.

The giants tried to pursue them. But the invincible Frank with his electric thunderbolts stood in the way and over went every big brute who came in contact with him.

Barney and Pomp were saved.

They were now far down the pass. Frank saw that nothing more could be done. He took

advantage of a lull in the fight to pull the rope.

Then like a flash he vanished up between the walls of the pass.

A moment later and he was upon the airship's deck.

"Now to find Barney and Pomp!" he cried, throwing off the electric pugilistic rigging. "Cut off the current, doctor."

But Vaneyke had already done this. Into the pilot-house Frank sprung.

The catamaran was sent ahead, and the search-light played up and down the pass. In its glare Barney and Pomp were seen running at full speed for the open country.

They saw the catamaran above them, and paused, waving their arms.

Down settled the air-ship.

Dr. Vaneyke lowered a rope ladder, and upon this they sprang. Even while they were climbing it the catamaran shot up, and not a moment too soon.

The giants, in hot pursuit, were close upon them.

But the danger was over.

Barney and Pomp had been rescued by the ingenuity and clear grit of Frank Reade, Jr. It was a matter for congratulation.

The two servitors were indeed thankful themselves for the escape. They realized that it was all due to the wonderful effort of their young master.

The catamaran hung over the pass until the light of day began to appear.

Frank's intention was to descend and secure the big diamond imbedded in the wall of the pass. But as day broke a very singular thing was observed.

There was a peculiar yellow haze in the atmosphere and a stillness was upon all nature.

The two scientists in particular noted this, and remarks were made upon it.

"Such a thing always forebodes one of three things," declared Ferry. "A typhoon, a tidal wave or an earthquake—"

He ceased speaking. Every one on board turned deadly pale.

There was a certain quivering of the atmosphere, a hissing as of currents of air and then an ominous thunder.

Glancing over the rail, all beheld an awful sight.

It was as if the whole face of the country below was in a state of commotion. The ground seemed broken into billows, huge rocks split asunder with thunderous report, and great bodies of water went rushing from their channels.

Such a scene none had ever before beheld. It seemed to last fully a minute. Then it was all over. The face of nature was once more smiling and peaceful.

But the spot where the pass had been was now a mighty mound. The pass was closed, the den of the strange giants was hermetically sealed, its occupants buried alive, and the mighty diamond, which the voyagers had coveted, was beyond reach forever.

The most thorough of search failed to reveal any trace of the ledge where it had been.

To dig for it would have been folly. It would have been worse than looking for a needle in a haystack.

Standing upon the mound made by the earthquake, the explorers looked at each other.

"Well?" said Frank Reade, Jr., "what is the next move?"

"I have had enough," said Vaneyke.

"Let us go home," declared Ferry.

Barney and Pomp were only too delighted at the prospect of leaving this wild and barbarous part of the world.

The result was that twenty minutes later the catamaran was headed for Sydney.

The object of the expedition had been accomplished after all. The royal society's expedition had been rescued, the mystery of its fate solved. This was enough.

Diamonds and gold had no power to hold the explorers in North Australia longer.

At Sydney they were warmly greeted, and in America they met with an ovation. The two scientists went back to the Smithsonian Institute loaded with honors.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp were glad to get back to Readestown, and soon fell back into the old ruts.

But Frank Reade, Jr., still pursued his inventive studies, and it is possible that the reader may hear of him again in the near future, in new and thrilling adventures in another land and 'mid other scenes.

With this, dear reader, comes our story to

[THE END.]